

# **An Archaeology of the Invisible? Tracing Poverty and its Ideology in the Viking Age and Urban Settlements**

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## Abstract

Publications have recently drawn attention to archaeology's historically predominant focus on prestige items and the elite, highlighting the need for a greater focus on society's lower classes. A few studies have discussed how, or even whether poverty can be addressed in historical archaeology. However, the phenomenon has not seen the same attention in Viking Age studies, despite the great deal of research into social hierarchies and the various identities within them. This study will discuss poverty in Medieval and Viking Age ideology and investigate whether these ideologies are expressed archaeologically in Viking Age urban settlements. Considering the nature of this topic as a study of a social phenomenon that is presumably tied to a lack of material remains, the goal of this study is not to find single criteria that is indicative of poverty, but rather to provide a theoretical toolkit and an aggregate of criteria which can be used to investigate poverty. Social structures and ideologies will be examined through a literature study of existing research on various Early Medieval written sources of the Viking Age, an analysis of existing discourses on Christian ideology of the Middle Ages, as well as a survey of existing archaeological research that is relevant to consider for this topic or future studies. The case study of Kaupang will be used to test whether the perspectives can be applied in practice to specific urban sites in order to conclude what aspects of poverty can be discussed archaeologically.

## 1. Introduction

The overall interest and aims of this thesis can be situated into recent research trends in social archaeology which include looking for identities, embodiment and the lived experience, or ways of being in the world. Also related to these recent trends are histories of the subaltern, which are getting more attention not only in the academic world but also in broader social awareness. A few studies have discussed how, or even whether poverty can be addressed in historical archaeology, however, the phenomenon has not seen the same attention in Viking Age studies. This thesis is comprised of four main components: the theoretical perspectives that it provides for future studies on poverty, a historical analysis and background which critically looks at existing academic discourse and primary sources in order to discuss contemporaneous ideologies of poverty, an analysis of social identities during the Viking Age based on archaeological research, and finally considering the previous two sections within the context of a case study of the urban centre of Kaupang in modern day Norway.

This thesis is not directly concerned with a single kind of material culture or archaeological feature. This is simply due to the inherent lack of prestige goods that the state of poverty entails, which has thus made investigations into this topic quite challenging—after all, how can you investigate poverty if the poor leave behind poor remains? The critical intervention of this thesis lies in testing out a possible way of going about this question through the theoretical perspectives that are applied, as well as the analysis of societal ontology and ideology regarding poverty and the subaltern. This thesis is an attempt at investigating whether this is a question archaeologists can ask of the materials we have, specifically within a Viking Age urban context.

## 1.1 Aims and Research Questions

In order to investigate what poverty in the Viking Age would have looked like one would have to define individuals, primarily by looking at the social systems they operate in, and furthermore what the consequences of these operations are. The aim of this thesis can thus be framed as a study of identity and ideology—that is, in considering how and if a distinct identity of poverty was manifested in the Viking Age. Furthermore, I also aim to frame the subaltern within complex social stratifications and networks, thus stressing the importance of social networks and dependencies within Viking Age societies.

Although this aim will be quickly answered by the theoretical toolkit and methodology that is provided in the next section, it is first necessary to determine how to best approach the concept of poverty—meaning how can one define poverty in a way that is appropriate within Viking Age societies (or pre-modern Western societies for that matter). This can be thought of as the first aim of this thesis. The subsequent aims of this thesis and their respective secondary questions are as follows:

- to investigate poverty in Medieval and Viking Age ideology
  - How is poverty and the importance of social belonging stressed in the ideology of Viking Age society?
- to investigate the how these ideologies are expressed archaeologically in Viking Age urban settings?
  - More specifically, how is this expressed in a Viking Age urban setting? Was space divided according to social hierarchies and can anything like poorer neighbourhoods or discrete areas where poverty was confined be identified?

In answering these questions, I intend to get to the larger overarching question and answering what is surely a much larger question beyond the scope of this thesis: what did it *mean* to be poor?

## 1.2 Research history

Recent publications have pointed out archaeology's predominant focus on items of prestige and the elite as an increasing amount of research is generally being done on society's lower classes. Poverty specifically has only been addressed, to my knowledge, by historical archaeology (Hansson et al. 2020; Newman 2013). Despite a growing number of publications on social hierarchies, identity, lived experience and the subaltern of the Viking Age in Scandinavia, the topic of poverty has not yet been addressed as its own topic within this field, receiving only passing mentions instead. This makes writing a research history of this topic quite difficult. It should be stressed that since this thesis is exploratory in nature, much of this thesis is thus an analysis of previous research in order to establish a starting point for future research. This section is more of a general summary of how poverty has been approached in historical archaeology and trends in urban archaeology, while more in-depth analyses of existing discourses are presented throughout the thesis.

A major issue that has come up is the research focus and the questions that are being asked from urban settlements, namely that they largely pertain to the presence of trading or specified craft production, whether a particular site can be categorized as a town, and definitions and descriptions of the first wave of urbanization. More recently, researchers have focused on unique aspects and functions of towns, instead of whether characteristics of urbanization are present, such as an increase in population density, varied economic activities, a role as a 'central place', and a decreased reliance on agriculture as a sole occupation, to name a few (Skre 2007 pp. 46-47; Hadley and ten Herkel 2013). However, this still does not tackle the question of everyday life, or how the social changes that are commonly expected to have occurred in urban spaces would have been experienced. Furthermore, the discussions of urban spaces remains centred on "big questions" about regional practices, prestige items and the creation of networks between such prominent sites (see beginning of chapter 4 for a more detailed discussion on the research history of urban sites). A gap in archaeological research appears to be the lack of attention to the possible existence and emergence of neighbourhoods within these urban spaces, as well as descriptions and social implications of the lived environment and spatial organization of urban spaces that was uniquely different from rural spaces (Croix 2020b).

The research done within subaltern and post-colonialist studies, is deeply intertwined with the history of poverty. Originally described by Gramsci, the subaltern refers to a

heterogeneous group of individuals who are of inferior rank and systemically excluded from and subordinated by socio-economic hierarchies of power and the dominant groups of society (Rogers et al. 2013; Hansson et al. 2020). Subaltern studies has its beginnings in the early 1980s amongst South Asian historians. It has since focused on critically presenting histories from the perspectives of the oppressed and producing historical research where the subaltern were “viewed as the subjects of history” (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 15). As Hansson et al. (2020) point out, historical archaeology is perhaps uniquely situated as a discipline to investigate living conditions of groups that are otherwise poorly represented in written sources (Hansson et al. 2020, p. 2). Viking Age archaeology is at an interesting intersection of prehistoric and historical archaeology, marked by the rarity of historical records created and surviving from this period. It is also a period marked by a gradual Christianization of society and its consequences in the burial record—where burials have fewer or no grave goods that can help interpret staged identities. However, there is an abundance of research that is only growing in social archaeology and studies of Norse written sources that gives researchers insight into societies, albeit not at the detail that historical archaeology can provide. Archaeological studies of slavery and unfree workers have provided a great deal of information about the subaltern in the Viking Age (Raffield 2019; Roslund 2020;2007; *see also* Brink 2021), however this topic is discussed more closely in section 3.1. The archaeology of care and attention to the individuality of experience of illness and disability has also been gaining attention in historical archaeology (Powell et al. 2017), as well as within Viking Age archaeology, namely through osteological research (Arcini 2018). Similarly, ideas of urban identity and lived experience have also received recent academic attention (Croix 2020b; ten Herkel et al. 2013) that will be discussed in chapter 4. It is perhaps because this period straddles both historical and prehistoric methods that such a leap from studying historical to prehistoric poverty can be made. A great deal of this thesis is dedicated to reconstructing the attitudes and ideologies regarding poverty and the subaltern from relevant extant sources.

### 1.3. Theory and Methods

The nature of this topic as a study of a social phenomenon that is presumably tied to a lack of material remains, makes the following theoretical perspectives essential. This thesis' focus on topics of identity, ideology, and social ontology, requires a clear outline of the perspectives and necessary methods. The theoretical perspectives ought to provide the framework to discuss the following:

- How poverty can (or should) be defined in a period with few extant written sources
- How the broader genre of social archaeology can help characterize a way of being-in-the-world for an ambiguously defined social class by discussing implications from known social structures
- How social stratifications and hierarchies of power interact in forming a heterogenous group of individuals that could be considered 'poor', and where intersectionality fits into an individual's interaction within their social systems

In terms of policy making and sociological research within our contemporary societies, various factors are recognized as having an impact on poverty. Namely, how certain groups are impacted differently based on race, gender, disabilities, migrant status, accessibility to education, mental health, and healthcare to name a few. This highlights why an intersectional approach is particularly useful, as it allows the consideration of how all these identities with their own forms of discrimination contribute to poverty. A per-capita income necessary to cover basic needs that defines a poverty line is often used as criteria to assess poverty by governments or international bodies like the WHO (World Health Organization n.d.). Child and infant mortality, homelessness, life expectancy, malnutrition and similar health issues are effects often associated with poverty (DAC Network on Poverty Reduction 2003). However, such criteria may not be as useful in defining poverty historically, let alone archaeologically.

Perhaps the most basic way of defining poverty within a context where we have few sources that help researchers specifically address how it functioned and was experienced socially, let alone defined economically, is to isolate, and then expand upon the central criteria of the economically defined poverty line: the necessity of meeting basic needs. Of course, there are physiological needs that are objectively necessary for an individual's survival—such as food, water, warmth, and rest for example. However, we need to consider that "basic" needs beyond



bare survival are also culturally and temporally defined. This also leads to the issue of distinguishing between relative and absolute poverty, as an “age-old question in poverty measurement” that is tackled by economists (Foster 1998; Choong Weng Wai et al. 2019). Relative poverty considers minimum standards of living *in comparison* to the average living standards within a particular society (or country), focusing on the distribution at the bottom income categories, as well as to other benchmark distributions (Choong Weng Wai et al. 2019, p. 3). Considering the difficulties of working with a period with few written sources which makes determining and describing discrete absolute poverty lines probably impossible, it is perhaps more useful for this thesis to approach this issue of poverty in relation to the standards of living between hierarchical classes as well as within the slight differentiations between the lower hierarchies of Viking Age society—thus providing more concrete criteria to look for rather than if basic needs are met.

Seeing as social hierarchies are going to be so central, the background of how these hierarchies were experienced is necessary. Thus, the culturally specific and unconscious constraints in which individuals act through will be considered. Agency or practice theory is an important perspective in this thesis due to focus on how people interact within their existing social structures. When discussing practice theory, Bourdieu (1977; 1990) ought to be addressed, considering that so much of its application in archaeology draws from his theories (Robb 2010, p. 495; Silliman 2000, p. 192; Díaz-Andrieu and Lucy 2005, p. 5). Giddens (1979; 1984 *in* Díaz-Andrieu and Lucy 2005, p. 5) presents the similarly influential concept of practical consciousness, where society’s construction and existence is enabled by the actions and practices of its individuals.

*Habitus* can be defined as “learned cultural structures” (Robb 2010, p. 495) that are products of specific historical contexts or “schemes generated by history” (Bourdieu 1990, p. 54). *Habitus* is intrinsic, as it “provides the reflexes” with which people interact with the choices of their daily lives, however it also not taught or formulated as an explicit “doctrine” but rather learned through various interactions with its basic principles, or the “principles that governed practice” (Robb 2010, p. 495; Díaz-Andrieu and Lucy 2005, p. 5). Another key concept is that habitus both restricts and enables action (Silliman 2000, p. 192; Robb 2010 p. 495). For Robb (2010, p. 495) changes in behaviour can lead to changes in *habitus* as well, however the related concept of *doxa*, or a “self-evident and natural order which goes without saying and therefore goes

unquestioned”, is also at play in this phenomenon once it gets fractured (*see further* Silliman 2000, p. 194). Significantly, Joyce and Lopiparo (2005, p. 370) suggest that the fragmentation of doxa "is not limited to confrontational extremes."

Within this lies the question of agency. One of the definitions of identity for Díaz-Andreu and Lucy (2005, p. 1) is “inextricably” linked to a sense of belonging, as either individual or external perception of belonging to certain groups but not others. Group belonging is also enabled by active engagement, thus providing an explanation of how identities are not static as they are constructed through processes that make them subject to change (Díaz Andreu and Lucy 2005, p. 2). For Robb (2010 p. 498), agency is a dialectic, a dual process where both the individual and their society influence each other. Although actors possess an implicit knowledge of the situations they negotiate within and of their *habitus*, their actions can both intentionally and unintentionally change the conditions for said actions (Robb 2010 p. 498.) An example of this discourse is Pauketat et al.’s (2000) concept of the “tragedy of the commoners”, or the unconscious participation of commoners in their own subordination as individuals of all statuses participate in the production of social order. Johansen and Bauer (2011, p. 4) also argue how political practices are embedded in everyday life and practices, focusing on how architectural practices and the spatial production of landscapes reflected politically motivated practices that produced, reinforced, and defined social differences. Intentionality has its own theoretical discourse in archaeology, however for the purposes of this thesis, it is potentially difficult to access archaeologically. Intentionality is most clearly addressed when identity is contested or where tension is expressed, however in the settings of everyday life “such tensions are difficult to identify” (Croix 2020b, p. 123). This perspective is used in this thesis to consider how actors and the subaltern negotiated and the experienced power structures within their environments, including work and domestic spaces.

The fluidity and overlap of identities will lead to a discussion on intersectionality, a concept originating from third-wave feminism (i.e. Black feminism and critical race theory) (DeWitte et al. 2020, p. 46). The concept of intersectionality is based on considering the way an individual’s multiple social identities and “categories of social difference” interact, and thus experiencing “multiple social statuses”(Springer et al., 2012 *in* DeWitte et al. 2020, p. 46). The other key part of this approach is the consideration of how each of these identities are shaped and interact with existing power structures and social inequalities (DeWitte et al. 2020, p. 46). It considers the

effects of intersections of various social differences, most often pertaining to race, gender, sexuality and class, yet also economic, political, cultural, the impact of systemic oppression and the value particular societies place on various kinds of cultural capital (Zuckerman 2020, p. 33). Fundamentally, this approach recognizes the entangled nature of all these factors and identities, thus meaning that a single identity should not be analysed individually (Zuckerman 2020, p. 33). Instead, intersectionality aims to consider the *intersections* of various identities and the unique experience they collectively produce in relation to a society's power structure. Such processes include social mediation, interaction with broader cultural discourse or norms and performance through actions and embodiment (Díaz Andreu and Lucy 2005, p. 2). Identities are also not static, nonetheless including Viking Age societies. Masculinity is lost and gained with age, or by women (Clover 1986), slaves and migrants may entangle their cultures (Stockhammer 2012) or gain their freedom, dependencies can shift with age and illness, not to mention the possibility of unsuccessful periods of agriculture or trade that could impact an individual's 'occupation' and lifestyle.

As previously mentioned, when discussing poverty, the concept of the subaltern is particularly useful. Hansson et al. (2020, p. 3) use Gramsci's original definition of subaltern as a "collective term for several different groups of subordinate people," who were united in spite of their differences through their "vulnerable, inferior rank in society." Furthermore, subaltern studies have recognized that such a heterogeneous group cannot be "united artificially by a Marxism that insists on reducing the many diverse experiences of oppression and marginalization to the single axis of class" (Chakrabarty 2000, p. 26). Seeing as this term recognizes this diversity, using subaltern instead of 'the poor' as Hansson et al. (2020) do, is more appropriate within the contexts of Viking Age Scandinavia as well. This term is not only complementary to the employed perspectives of intersectionality, but also because this study is concerned with individuals' inferior status and vulnerability to impoverished living rather than a specific ideological definition of 'the poor.'

In order to explain how the subaltern of 19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden "used, understood, and perceived the physical world in relation to other groups in society," Hansson (2020, p. 4) uses the conceptual models of *matterscape*, *mindscape* and *powerscape*. *Matterscape* refers to natural conditions constituting material reality, *powerscapes* refer to the social and cultural conditions, both implicit and explicit rules that influence group behaviour (which could be related to the

concept of habitus), while *mindscapes* includes internalized and subjective individual experiences of one's particular landscape (Hansson 2020, p. 4). Such concepts have been considered within the case study of Kaupang.

A significant medium through which hierarchies are produced and negotiated is household politics. Bowser et al. (2004) consider how households were not always necessarily a cohesive unit as different personhoods, genders, political practices, and strategies interacted and enacted by different groups within the same space. Furthermore, they also challenge the idea of the home as a private sphere, and the public (political) sphere lies outside of the home, proposing instead that the public and private co-existed within the household and depended instead on the audiences present in the home (Bowser et al. 2004, p. 164). This is particularly relevant when feast events are considered, not only in elite households but also amongst the lower classes. Eriksen (2019, p. 68-88) furthermore depicts the household as a microcosmos of social hierarchies, considering the heterogeneous groups of people (and animals) that would have inhabited Viking Age longhouses. This is particularly exemplified through strategies of exclusion that enforced social stratification and thus impacted how different individuals experience the same space in different ways. This can be interpreted in part with the help of intersectionality, as various entangled identities interacted with power structures enacted in the household. Flewellen (2017) also argues that a way of including the histories of the marginalized, or the archaeologically invisible, can be done through discussion of separations and divisions of space.

Although concepts such as Bourdieu's theories of cultural capital are likely useful for future studies on poverty that can consider other nuances of poverty such as cultural or religious poverty, the goals of this thesis remain in understanding the social systems and ideologies in which poverty, in its simplest sense, functioned within and how it was perceived. This particular theoretical framework has been provided in order to take an emic approach to poverty that is more dynamic than a general descriptive etic approach, thus focusing on internal elements of this particular culture and their functions as they would have been experienced by members of various groups.

Methodologically, the two major components of this thesis are the sections analysing existing discourses on societal structures and ideology in the Viking Age and Christian ideology of the Middle Ages (chapters 2 and 3), and the case studies presented in chapter 4. The case

study of Kaupang will be used to explore which evidence brought up in chapter 3 can be discussed, and whether existing methods of excavation and report writing leave anything to be said about the presence of subaltern. Seeing as studies of identities are deeply tied to material culture, and that poverty is conceptually limited by a supposed absence of material, “cultural items” such as spatial layout (including burial practices) and architecture as a medium through which social relationships are negotiated are important forms of evidence for this thesis (Díaz-Andreu and Lucy 2005, p. 9). The overall strategy of this thesis is to consider circumstantial evidence of poverty, rather than assuming to find a ‘smoking gun’ that would immediately indicate this. The methodology of this thesis also lies in what theoretical framework is applied, and testing whether such a framework is useful to reinterpret existing evidence from a site.

Simply put, the theoretical intervention of this thesis project is the use of social identity, intersectionality, and the subaltern in order to tackle the concept of poverty. By taking an intersectional perspective and considering how various identities contributed to the intersectional experience of an individual we can get closer to defining what is meant by poverty in the Viking Age, and who such individuals might have been. For instance, an individual may not have been experiencing poverty simply because they had a physical impairment, or simply because they were a female textile worker, but because they were a female textile worker who later suffered from a physical impairment and could not be taken into the care of her family members. From this example we can see how gender, ‘profession’, health and disability, and social/familial networks all play a part in an individual falling into poverty. Fundamentally, I would characterise this study as an investigation into a social identity that has not yet been defined.

## 2. Ideology and Social Hierarchies in Medieval Europe and Viking Age Scandinavia

This chapter aims to present a literature study of extant research on various Early Medieval written sources, specifically considering the academic discourse and primary sources and what can be said about ideology. The first section addresses how poverty was conceptualized within the medieval period in Europe, and further discusses the different models of poverty between rural and urban setting. The second section of this chapter discusses discourses on the various written sources relevant to the Viking Age in Scandinavia to consider what can be said about ideologies of poverty and social hierarchies and practices that would have affected the poor and subaltern.

### 2.1 Poverty in Christian Ideology and the Middle Ages

The end of the Viking Age and the beginning of the Middle Ages in Scandinavia is often hard to pinpoint, partially due to the gradual process of Christianization of Scandinavia between the ninth and eleventh centuries. This period of transition lasted as long as two centuries in some regions (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993, p. 104), where both the pagan and Christian religion co-existed. Various aspects of Christianity were adopted and negotiated within Scandinavian culture during this period of transition. This is particularly relevant to this thesis topic, as Christianity has a specific characterization of poverty, which an increasing number of people would have encountered as the religion spread and would have potentially impacted the perception of poverty in the later Viking Age especially. Furthermore, written descriptions of beggars, vagrants and the undesirable poor from Scandinavian sources are, of course, largely from legal codes and sagas (Cochrane 2002; Jochymek 2019), which were written in the centuries of the Middle Ages which followed the Viking Age, and are often described to have been influenced by Christian ideology. Geremek's scholarship on poverty is perhaps the most prominent work focusing specifically on the history of poverty in Europe, thus his work will be heavily relied upon for the analysis of the conceptualizations of poverty in continental Europe which will be provided in this section (*see also* Geremek et al. 1991).

In this section, useful concepts such as shame and value of the poor as expressed through Christian ideology, and the importance of community and social networks as a safety net that was essential in 'normal' times of uncertainty tied to an agriculturally dependent lifestyle will be

considered. Distinctions between urban and rural forms of poverty will also be addressed, as well as what kind of individuals were included in the Christian and medieval conceptualization of the poor and subaltern. Attention to social topology of medieval cities is also potentially pertinent, as questions of exclusion and access are considered. In summarizing these aspects, a temporal and culturally relevant parallel to discuss differences and similarities to the Viking Age will arise in the next section. Keeping in mind that cultural analogies should be approached with caution, considering the social mechanism of poverty in the early Middle Ages, potentially provides a closer step to trying to isolate what to look for within the Viking Age, especially as rural and urban poverty is considered.

Depending on the scholarship or geographical area, the Middle Ages can span from the 5<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries across vastly different cultures in Europe. The scholarship done on poverty in the Middle Ages is largely focused on Western Europe, yet remains relevant to this thesis' topic largely due to the unifying and continuous cultural element of Christianity, not only through its religious ideology that permeated societies, but also the largely uniform institutions that it was made up of (ibid., pp 15-16). It is also important to note here that perceptions of poverty changed throughout the Middle Ages through theological discourse, roles of institutions, government and social elite (as described by legislation), as well as popular opinion (ibid., p. 15). The discussion in this thesis will largely be restricted to the Early or High Middle Ages for the sake of relevance due to contemporaneity with the period in question or the period in which relevant written sources will be considered.

As Geremek points out, the history of ideas, doctrines, or ideology, is comparatively easy to approach than the history of culture, attitudes, or social structure (ibid., p. 18). This is not only due to the "elusive" and slow nature of changes in collective attitudes and value systems (ibid.), but also the inability to define a society by one set of values as difficulties of identifying and analysing changes in social attitudes or structure when looking for variances between different groups or individuals *within* a particular society. However, given that Christian ideology (including that towards poverty) as manifested in the lives of many in medieval Europe through the influence of Rome or various monastic orders, the changing theological discourse on the ideology of poverty in the first centuries of Christianity is worth addressing.

The exaltation of poverty and the close link between salvation and the poor is an intrinsically characteristic and "permanent element" of Christianity, especially in early Christian thought.

This is especially interesting in periods when Christianity becomes the dominant religion of both the aristocracy and ruling institutions, considering the paradox of exalting the lowly subaltern in deeply hierarchical societies with ruling elite. Both the 3<sup>rd</sup> century Church philosopher Tertullian and Bible itself point out that God favoured the poor (ibid., p. 21), as “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God” (Matthew XIX: 23-24). Furthermore, Tertullian and Ignatius, the Bishop of Anthioch in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, also stresses the duty of Christians of providing social aid or charity for the poor and destitute (Crislip 2005, p. 53). However, not only should we account for a discrepancy between doctrine and real world application due to social attitudes, agency or regional differences in interpretation, as previously mentioned (Geremek 1994, p. 19), but Christian ideology also discusses different kinds of poverty, and which individuals were worthy of charity, compassion and exaltation. This exaltation crucially distinguishes, in both biblical terminology and early Christian theological literature (such as hagiographies), that in order to be a virtue or provide sanctity, poverty must be voluntary and include the values of humility and renunciation (ibid., p. 19). A humble acceptance of the fate bestowed unto one by God was expected, be it weakness and poverty, or wealth and power (ibid., p. 17). The pauper who refused to accept their conditions of life, or *pauper superbus*, received much criticism in moralistic literature from the early Middle Ages up to the 12<sup>th</sup> century (ibid., p. 30). Twelfth century theologian Gerhoh von Reichersberg distinguishes between the poor with Peter and the poor with Lazarus. The poor with Peter refers to clerical members and the voluntary poverty associated with convent life and discipline aimed at achieving spiritual “perfection” (ibid., p. 24). Furthermore, the hermit also voluntarily renounced society and material goods in seeking out salvation through “perfect poverty”, albeit through individual solitude rather than the communal living of monasteries (ibid., p. 32). The poor with Lazarus are defined as the secular poor, the individuals struggling with the “reality of material need” (ibid., p. 25). Crucially, individuals within this category were also perceived as objects, rather than “active subjects”, to receive aid from the Church or as means for the wealthy or Christian community to achieve salvation through charity and compassion (ibid., pp. 21, 25). Within the category of secular poor, a further distinction between the honest and dishonest poor, specifically by St. Ambrose and St. John Chrysostom (and potentially more general social attitudes), or individuals who are able to work, yet instead prefer to beg or steal, as compared to individuals who of course have no alternative, and were thus a priority for aid (ibid., p. 25).



Although all beggars were entitled to charity, such distinctions contributed to distrust, or uncertainty regarding individuals' "honesty" and moral qualities" which would make them deserving of said charity and compassion (ibid., p. 27).

Aside from a general humble acceptance of their lot in life, as well the inability to work, more specifically, the medieval Christian understanding of the poor worthy of charitable support also defines certain individuals. Poverty born of necessity included the starving, widows, the infirm, elderly, orphans, prisoners, and "madmen" which could "claim support in any situation" in proportion to the poverty of their condition and legal status (ibid., p. 26). In early church history, "Christian charities targeted the groups for whom the traditional support network failed to provide", providing services for individuals whose families or social groups could not do so, namely the groups listed above (Crislip 2007, p. 55). Geremek points out that a large proportion of individuals receiving alms were those who had fallen on hard times and unfortunate circumstances such as the death or illness of a family's main provider, or natural disasters such as fires, thus resulting in honourable reasons for their poverty (Geremek 1994, p. 43). Such situations are similarly related to a failure of the traditional support system which Crislip mentions, or social and material degradation, which would have been impacted by the changes associated to urban development. In the later medieval period, alongside the professionalization of the beggar and the importance of the appearance to elicit compassion, and thus alms, as a "professional technique" as well as genuine need, there are also comments about a common identity of the beggar tied to their clothing or their bodies, such as ragged clothing, illness, old age, or visible physical disabilities (ibid., p. 48). Finally, there are the categories of pilgrims and hermits, which have been discussed previously, as well as the slight distinction between vagrants and beggars, where vagrants were generally perceived as non-local residents (ibid., p. 47)

This doctrine of charity, compassion, and eventually the "economics of salvation", soon changed Church structures, but also entrusted Church institutions with the responsibility for "social compassion, generosity, and for safeguarding the interests of the poor" (ibid., p. 20). Geremek points out that social changes brought about increasing problems of poverty, and the need to justify moneyed wealth led to the increased development of charitable institutions and mendicant orders. It was not until the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> century that individual charity became more widespread as the newly emerging social class of the urban elite became included in the class of

benefactors (ibid., p. 41). Without overstressing pragmatic efforts by wealthy individuals to buy their salvation and giving proper due to genuine efforts of compassion, charitable work was also “an ostentatious way of demonstrating one's wealth and Christian principles” (ibid., p. 17). Alternatively, the majority of wealthy individuals ‘bought’ their salvation through other charitable deeds through donating or aiding the Church, or funding new shrines (ibid., p. 21). Such donations were nonetheless firstly used for maintenance and upkeep on monasteries, hospitals, and religious orders, while direct aid to the poor “came last on the list” (ibid., p. 23). However, it was already determined with Charlemagne’s rule that monasteries allotted a third or a quarter of their revenue to aiding the poor or by redistributing donations into alms for these individuals (ibid., p. 17), of course depending on whether their budget would allow the organization of wide-spread alms distribution, which consequently led to varying degrees of ‘specialization’ of alms giving for certain monasteries, while for others it was a “marginal” part of their work (ibid., pp. 23; 40-41). Furthermore, the understanding that the beggar was bound to praying for his benefactor in return for material aid was not fully realized as a “contract” until the 12<sup>th</sup> century (ibid., p. 48). Geremek also brings up the beggar’s awareness of their usefulness, which would have influenced their behaviour, especially in the later Middle Ages when the ‘professionalization’ of beggars took shape (ibid., p. 48). Along with professional strategies of looking the part of a beggar, or performatively displaying the misfortune or causes of one’s poverty (i.e., infirmity or injury, numerous “miserable looking” family members, or one’s clothing and appearance), which further lead to criticism and distrust of the poor (ibid., p. 50).

Alms could include a variety of aid, including monetary donations, food or meals, as well as shelter and medical care from hospitals. More specifically, the Seven Works of Mercy include feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, visiting prisoners, and the sick, giving drink to the thirsty, and sheltering the stranger (*see* Matthew 25:32-36) (*Fig. 1*). Throughout the Middle Ages, holidays, or days of religious significance, sovereign tours, or exceptional acts of donations as specified in the wills of deceased elites or sovereigns, led to events of widespread distribution of alms oftentimes described in sources to thousands of individuals (Geremek 1994, pp. 36-37).

Although a history of the development of hospitals is beyond the scope of this thesis, as it traces its medicinal and organizational roots in antiquity, certain aspects of these unique spaces are useful for consideration, as it offers insight into the nature of Christian health care, and the kind of ‘services’ the poor generally received in hospitals. Pointing out the title of hospitals as “God’s House”, Wallis (2010, p. 461) describes the hospital as a house in and of itself—as a built space providing shelter or refuge organized as a religious community with God as the head of household. This community was principally preoccupied with God’s work itself: charity (Wallis 2010, p. 461). Hospitals and hospices provided temporary refuge and the organized distribution of alms to wandering paupers (including pilgrims), a hospice for the dying, an almshouse for the elderly poor, an orphanage for foundlings, a hospital for the sick poor (or *infirmi pauperi*), or all of the above (Geremek 1994, pp. 26; Wallis 2010, p. 461).

Within the medieval understanding of the maintenance of health, regimen and preventative medicine, through the maintenance of hygiene and diet, was the predominant approach to ‘treatment’, and was included in multiple medical treatises available to the medieval audience of medical learning roughly from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards (Henderson et al. 2007, p. 135). Additionally, it was also understood that emotions affected health, and that “negative emotions” could generate bodily illnesses (Henderson et al. 2007, p. 135). Besides material needs, Crislip (2005, p. 63) also frames that early monastic provided emotional support for their monks and initiates, and presumably to the individuals they cared for as well. This is an aspect Geremek (1994) overlooks in overstating the pragmatism of charity. The spiritual direction, as well as the semblance of a substitute for social support which the Church would have provided to these individuals is worth noting. Furthermore, Henderson et al. (2007, p. 138) also stresses the potential importance of “clinical talking”, or “reassuring rhetoric”, of pre-modern healers which is often overlooked in the history of medicine due to modern understandings of the importance of



Figure 1. *The Works of Mercy in a fourteenth-century manuscript (British Library, Yates Thompson MS. 31, f. 110v)*

biomedicine. The institution of the hospital was concerned with treating both the body and the soul, as aspects of monastic life were embedded in the hospital, as Henderson et al. (2007) argue that the true medicine of hospitals was religion, considering that spiritual medicine and was perceived to be medicinal (an aspect that becomes increasingly salient towards the late medieval and Renaissance periods) (*ibid.*, p. 141). After all, the majority of the care provided by hospitals was administered and organized by religious personnel, even though doctors and surgeons were called when needed (Wallis 2010, p. 461).

Concepts of shame, or loss of honour and dignity associated to a low social position, as well as having to resort to charity or social welfare is clearly associated to our modern understandings and associations to poverty, however, this is potentially more complex in the medieval period. Geremek (1994, pp. 39-40) points out that the “shamefaced poor” only referred to individuals who have lost their “middle, or even upper” social class status and have been reduced to poverty, and not the “working class”, for whom destitution was supposedly a common aspect of life, and thus for them, the acceptance of charity is not itself a shameful act. In the case of the shamefaced poor, two concepts of shame come together that hints at the possible rift between ideology and social practice. Firstly, the shame of a decline in social status, and secondly (from a supposedly more theological perspective), is the sins of the poor, or an individual’s shame, and thus rejection, of their humiliation and state of poverty, and furthermore their desire for material possessions and for deeming the rich happier because of them (*ibid.*, pp. 29, 39).

Before shifting the discussion to the topic of rural poverty, the common theme throughout this thesis of the importance of hierarchies and social structure must be addressed. The question of social networks as support systems for these rural communities are an essential component in trying to isolate what factors could contribute to poverty. Geremek discusses this topic from the perspective that the changes of social classes and the development and consequent exploitation of the growing class of paupers, contributed to more widespread famine and poverty. Perhaps in understanding how poverty functioned in the Middle Ages, the systems that led to increased poverty, and thus understanding the key differences that could suggest a similar scenario might not have been the case in Viking Age Scandinavia. Furthermore, by considering how rural livelihoods and poverty worked, a more direct link to the archaeological record can be considered.

Geremek points out that the term pauper (*pauperes*) was, during the Carolingian period, used to distinguish between the lowest of the social classes and the elite or to distinguish between freedmen and serfs, and gradually became used discretely for individuals who were relying on alms or welfare by the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Geremek 1994, p. 52; Wickham 2005, p. 574). According to Geremek, this change in meaning is directly tied to the increase of material poverty, and thus the increased need of relying on alms associated to the process of pauperization- or individuals who are no longer able to provide for themselves in accordance to the subsistence of their respective social status (Hobsbawm 1968 *in* Geremek 1994, p. 53).

According to Geremek (1994), until the 12<sup>th</sup> century, there were no proletarianized category of individuals and the social network functioned relatively well as a safety net. Although a critique of Geremek's interpretation of a pre-capitalist group of individuals as a proletariat is beyond the scope of this thesis, it could be useful to, albeit critically, consider a group of individuals whose sole possessions of economic value being their potential for labour could be useful considering the importance of being able to work in a society that is agriculturally subsistent. Nonetheless, treating various groups as one unified group of a proletariat oversimplifies social stratification and differentiation, as well as various other factors. Furthermore, Geremek's analysis of the process and regional variation is very complicated to understand and pinpoint at what time and where proletarianization occurs.

### 2.1.1 Rural poverty

Despite the gradual development of agricultural techniques, as can be seen for instance when comparing the Merovingian to the Carolingian period, the risks of famine and constant fear of hunger was particularly salient. This, along with the demographic expansion and feudal exploitation, made poverty an endemic aspect of rural livelihood so much so that smaller farms with few reserves found it difficult to survive recurrent bad harvest years (Geremek 1994, p. 54). Nonetheless, due to local "solidarity" regardless of social differentiation between peasant classes, the tragic impacts of famine were felt universally by communities, and once over "life returned to normal" (Geremek 1994, p. 54).

Although not meant to wholly encapsulate general trends of development of rural poverty, but rather specific cases that could have occurred at various times throughout the medieval period, Geremek outlines two models of rural poverty within Early and High Middle

Ages on the European continent, which nonetheless provides a useful starting point from which poverty can be approached and compared to even in the Viking Age Scandinavia. The first model describes the kind of impoverishment that affects a whole community due to “fluctuating social circumstances, natural disasters, feudal land rents and variable relations between feudal masters and peasant farmers”, as previously described, and thus does not result in a pauperization process (Geremek 1994, p. 59). In this model, community solidarity “softened the blow” and protected the old, infirm and families without support from becoming wandering beggars and remain in their respective communities, as cases of complete impoverishment, and thus being left with no choice but to leave one’s village to seek other means of subsistence, were rare until the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Geremek 1994, p. 59; Wickham 2005, p. 551). It remains unclear, however, whether the same individuals begging for alms in the supposed post-proletarianization after the 12<sup>th</sup> century were cared for by their responsible social network. It is also perhaps useful to consider the significance of the peasant “nuclear family”, consisting of married couples, their children, as well as potentially family elders, as the primary connection and economic unit throughout early medieval Europe (Wickham 2005, p. 551). While extended kin and neighbour relations were “generally reliable”, Wickham argues that they nonetheless served as secondary connections that could be subject to negotiation—especially in contexts of exchange and in times of crisis (Wickham 2005, p. 552). This idea however does not discuss, for example, the place slaves, as well as spouses’ respective parental and sibling connections which would extend or contradict a traditional nuclear family structure.

The second model is synonymous with the disintegration of the social systems of rural agrarian societies in response to the market economy penetrating and creating larger discrepancies of status within rural populations, as well as the process of pauperization and proletarianization. These distinctions could then be catalyzed by natural disasters which affected individuals differently (Geremek 1994, p. 58). This created a class of peasants who could no longer survive solely by cultivating their own land, or rather, having too little land to cultivate and thus characterized by “permanent insecurity” (ibid., p. 58). In the example of 13<sup>th</sup> century France, there was a great deal of variation in the percentage of individuals who experienced such an impact between regions (ibid., p. 59). As a last resort, extreme poverty led many peasants to voluntary serfdom, and in 8<sup>th</sup> century France labour and servitude was exchanged for protection by a feudal lord, which could extend to receiving food and clothing (ibid., pp. 54-55). There is

also the category of landless, or nearly landless peasants, who also made their living through additional labour for richer peasants or landed gentry. Although the size of farms did have an impact on the yield and economic success of farmers, other factors such as soil quality, animal ownership, or availability of labour necessary to work the land does not allow for direct correlation between land and wealth in all cases (ibid., p. 58). Furthermore, smaller parcels of land were more sensitive to larger impacts of bad harvests (ibid., p. 57). Overpopulation, or relative overpopulation in rural settings also meant shortage of work for such individuals within their own village. However, migration also required funds, and was thus not always a viable option (ibid., p. 56). By the 14<sup>th</sup> century seasonal short-term migration had also become quite common in southern France (ibid., p. 57). This constant search for work in response to economic and social changes is what largely characterises this second model of poverty. The outcome of this model of rural poverty are either individuals who in few cases turned to begging or vagrancy, or can alternatively be categorized as the “working poor” (ibid., p. 60). Significantly, these individuals could not ‘qualify’ as the shamefaced poor as their poverty did not contradict or alter their social status, nor were they poor by choice, or poor due to illness or disability - and thus not the main subjects of charity” (ibid., p. 60). Wickham (2005, pp. 570-571) discusses the phenomenon that Geremek calls pauperization in a different (and arguably clearer) way, by pointing out that in the second half of the early Middle Ages in Western Europe, peasants undoubtedly “lost ground” to aristocrats, meaning not simply that peasants lost their land to aristocrats, but rather that peasants lost control of their economic systems after the 700s. In “tribal economic systems”, as perhaps the Scandinavian system of aristocratic elite may be described, systems of tribute could turn into rents, or internal rank differences within a village would develop into local lords, thus instigating a process of transition into feudal modes and estates that later became dominant (Wickham 2005, p. 572). Of course, these are trends that happened at a microregional scale, and dependent on each village—let alone broad sweeping statements about regions. Although the second model of poverty outlines several complex social processes and outcomes that unravelled in various regions and time periods, it does provide various ways in which precarious subsistence lifestyles would have manifested and the alternatives individuals turned to—which could prove useful at the least for later comparison of differences in Scandinavia.

### 2.1.2 Urban poverty

Characterizing urban poverty in the medieval period will remain relatively brief in comparison to rural poverty, largely because it is tied to the overall process of medieval urbanization and the growth of cities and is thus a topic of great breadth in academic literature that extends to geographic region and time periods past the relevant period of this thesis topic. Institutions such as hospitals and monasteries were placed within the urban context, thus the previous discussion on this topic ought to be recalled and contextualized within these spaces. The growth of cities need not be solely simplified as a case of rural migration. Considering the costly need of resources required of migration, impoverished rural families would have likely preferred to remain in their villages, or migrate to surrounding villages, where there was ideally still the familiar social security net, given that “traditional agrarian structures” were not compromised (Geremek 1994, pp. 60-61). Geremek points out that it was largely wealthy peasants that “flooded” the cities of northern and central Italy as urban centres grew, while the rural poor were “less easily accepted” in this context (*ibid.*, p. 61). This is not to say that poverty and the subaltern were not found in urban spaces, rather, urban spaces created a different kind of poverty which was dependent on a city’s socio-economic structure, as well as its environment (*ibid.*, p. 62), such as population or the professional structure and role of production.

One of the major characteristics that define urban spaces is that its inhabitants did not have a solely agricultural occupation, and consequently were not occupied with food production, as its immediate rural surroundings often provided food and other materials (Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991, p. 158 *in* Croix 2020b, p. 118). However, Geremek (*ibid.*), and many other scholars, stress that especially in smaller urban centres agriculture “maintained its leading role”, and especially when considering the surrounding ‘rural’ environments, the social structures of the countryside, including village solidarity, remained salient. Although there was a great deal of variance across time periods and geographical contexts, within the context of Scandinavian emporia and proto-towns, the presence of agriculture was significant—thus the possibility of the rural social support system Geremek describes ought to also be considered. Nonetheless, urban places developed distinct urban identities, majorly in part to a way of life that was different from existing (i.e., rural) lifestyles—such as in the early town of Ribe (ten Herkel et al. 2021; Croix 2020b). In part to the dependency on rural food production, poor harvest and consequent



economic fluctuations also greatly impacted the urban poor, considering that most ‘wage-earners’ had to buy their food (Geremek 1994, p. 67).

Due to increased populations, especially in a few larger cities in Europe, these environments presented a sense of anonymity, as different ‘secondary’ groups provided community solidarity, for instance religious communities and brotherhoods, as well as professional organizations (i.e. guilds eventually) (ibid., pp. 62-63). However, Geremek points out that the development of these groups both united and divided individuals, as hierarchies and class differences were emphasized as time went on and cities grew, while in smaller towns social and material contrasts were supposedly not as evident (ibid., p. 63). Occupation and labour are, of course, important factors in the development of hierarchies, thus the opportunities and limitations of unskilled labourers in medieval urban spaces ought to be considered. However, such positions were likely temporary, and furthermore lacked the security provided by professional institutions, thus furthering the precarity the urban poor would have faced (ibid., p. 66).

In understanding that an urban space would have provided individuals with a variety of opportunities for unskilled labour, one may consider the variety of individuals that would have been present in urban spaces—especially since the discussion seems so often centred around trade, or other political institutions (such opportunities in Scandinavian urban settings are described in section 3.5). Geremek (ibid., p. 66) lists examples such as employment under craftsmen, occasionally unloading shipments and transporting merchandise, agricultural work, city construction and maintenance, while textile work has often been attributed specifically to female workers. Furthermore, domestic service offered more stable and socially recognized, albeit dependent, positions (ibid., p. 66). Alongside the various factors that caused fluctuations of the medieval economy, the lack of job and social security specifically characteristic of urban environments (ibid., p. 71) further meant that individuals who were out of work would have faced dangers of starvation in the city. Furthermore, by the late Middle Ages specifically, both slums and suburban spaces (settlements just outside city walls, hence “defining zones of poverty”) emerged as places where poverty could be confined within (ibid., p. 69), and simultaneously excluded from city life—thus experience some sense of liminality (whether similar phenomena are identifiable in a Scandinavian urban setting is addressed in section 4.1 and the Discussion). Geremek (ibid., p. 69) argues that the medieval city developed a “striking”

social topography that spatially reflected society's hierarchies not only through the development of slums, but also as neighbourhoods emerged, primarily as more valuable land in the vicinity of religious and economic centres of the city firmly established them as areas of the elite.

Furthermore, individuals of the same profession or guild membership tended to live in the same area, which could have been due to the nature or necessary environments of their work and could have been regulated and assigned by municipal authorities (*ibid.*), for example tanneries that needed access to water and were infamous for the waste and odour produced.

Differing from the growth of cities in Southern Mediterranean regions of Europe, most of which had "strong inheritance" from classical urban centres (Wickham 2005, p. 680), coastal emporia began developing around the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> centuries in northern Europe and the British Isles. Wickham (2005, p. 685) describes them as a new kind of town, with a purely artisanal and commercial function, as they were neither political nor ecclesiastical centres—although such descriptions are challenged in chapter 4. Furthermore, although they were "directly controlled" by the elite, Wickham clearly points out they are notably not described as a place of residence of the wealthy (2005, p. 685). Because emporia, or proto-towns, are the main kind of urban settlement that is seen in the Viking Age, they are also the main focus of the urban settlement case studies section of this thesis, thus this question will be more closely considered in chapter 4. This connection, or rather the similarities between emporia during this period is significant. Founded by royalty in the early 8<sup>th</sup> century, Ribe in Denmark represents the influence of the Frankish kingdom, as it was likely a "direct imitation" of the emporia of the Franks (Wickham 2005, p. 686). This influence has been addressed in terms of economics and materials; however, it is important to stress the influence upon lifestyle and lived experiences this emulation of Frankish towns would have had as well. Considered alongside the spread and growing exposure and influence of Christianity in Scandinavia, then one may also consider that both Christian ideology of poverty and different ways of living in new kinds of settlements both justifies the contextualization of poverty within a Christian and European context, as well as poses the question of how poverty was uniquely present amongst different urban contexts in Viking Age Scandinavia.

This section is largely necessary in helping describe the possible circumstances and conditions related to poverty in a relevant time period. Although the analysis in this section is perhaps more historical than archaeological, the background provided in this section is necessary

for understanding the circumstances and conditions that could have been experienced. The points will be further discussed firstly within a Viking Age context, and onwards contextualized within archaeological material. Although perhaps already evident, this section also underlines the difficulty of characterizing poverty, even in contexts where written sources are more readily available. In the following section, conceptualizations of the subaltern, specifically within Scandinavia, will be analysed through existing scholarship on contemporary written sources as well as archaeological discourses.

## 2.2 Poverty in Viking Age Society: Considering Norse Laws, Legal codes, and Sagas

Within this section, the ideas brought up in the previous section will be contrasted and compared to pertinent sources to the Viking Age in Scandinavia. This will include to what extent the Christian ideology and contemporaneous treatment of the poor on continental Europe permeated Viking Age Scandinavia. More specifically questions regarding shame, disdain, and the value of the poor, what individuals ‘qualify’ as poor, the importance of community and social networks (or ‘solidarity’), distinctions between rural and urban poverty, as well as social topology and topics of access and exclusion. Furthermore, the question of the extent of internalized Christian ideology into the mentalities of people outside the ecclesiastical classes will also be addressed.

The Christianisation process of Scandinavia must first be addressed in order to situate the relevance of this and the previous section. Christianization was a gradual process that spanned multiple centuries from first encounters in the 4<sup>th</sup> century through trade, travel or plunder and traditionally culminating in the generalized establishment of ecclesiastical institutions in the mid 11<sup>th</sup> century AD, specifically the establishment of archbishop’s sees in the 12<sup>th</sup> centuries in Denmark, Norway and Sweden (Ljung 2019, p. 162). During this period, new religious beliefs were gradually adapted and moulded within pre-existing world views, where prior beliefs and concepts mingled and “helped shape new varieties of Christianity” (Hedeager 2011, p. 25). Despite written sources of missionary activity in Scandinavia from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the possible existence of smaller Christian communities, such as in Birka, “there is little unambiguous archaeological evidence of Christian cult or beliefs in Scandinavia prior to the later part of the 10th century” (Ljung 2019, p. 163). Another significant milestone in the Christianisation process was the conversion of rulers, especially for Denmark and Norway. Particularly within archaeology, the Christianization of Scandinavia is considered through the analysis of runestones and grave monuments, the diversity of burial practices as well as settlement layout and the use of landscapes<sup>1</sup> (Ljung 2019; Wicker 2012; Sawyer and Sawyer

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<sup>1</sup> Ljung (2019, p.165) considers the way the broader landscape and the churchyard as places of commemoration and display of status and heritage bridge the transition of the gradual conversion process and hybridization of religious beliefs.

1993). Furthermore, the important role of women in the Christianization process is a topic of discussion in the archaeological discourse (Wicker 2012).

Primary source analysis, when used in Viking Age archaeology, seems to follow some formulaic approach where if a belief or practice is mentioned in sagas, and if it is also addressed by medieval law codes, they thus support interpretations of corresponding archaeological material. Raffield et al. (2017, p. 176) phrase it quite well in that “if an act needs to be expressly forbidden, then one may be reasonably sure that people are doing it.” Such perspectives allow the consideration of the ways in which belief and shared mentalities had a place in society, and thus the role of norms, cohesion and their permeance. This is particularly necessary in order to begin considering the extent to which Christian ideology, in this case specifically regarding poverty, was relevant in Viking Age societies. Since religious studies are employed within this discussion, some theoretical background about approaching religious ideology within societies will be presented.

### 2.2.1 Lay belief, legal codes, and norms

Nedkvinte (2009, p.33) points out three types of norms: religious ethics, codes of honour and laws which are “sufficiently precise to be useful in social analysis”. Materialist traditions regarding religious ideology propose that “materialist interests” of the class that possess the power to construct religious norms do so by recommending actions that suit their own interests (Nedkvinte 2009, p. 32). Considering what has been established in Section 2.1 about the interests of the elite in helping the poor, as well as the complex, oftentimes, paradoxical nature of the ideology that both the poor and elite would have struggled with, highlights the relevance of this perspective (Nedvinke 2009, p.32). On the matter of cohesion, Nedkvinte (2009, p. 30) brings up the post-modernist anthropological academic discourse on religion which “downgrades the ideological coherence of popular religion.” Despite the organization and institutionalisation of dogma of Christianity in Western Europe, the “normal situation” was that individuals or social groups were exposed to and likely internalized various religious practices, myths or folk beliefs, without being concerned with their ideological coherence, but rather their relevance and meaning in accordance with particular moments (unlike professional priests for instance) (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 30). The majority of individuals interacted with religion and its general ideas orally. Nedvinke cites anthropologist John Goody in arguing that this kind of interaction led people to

immediately consider the relevance of concepts, rather than its universal validity (2009, p. 31). Literary interaction with religion on the other hand would likely involve processing various theological and supernatural meanings into generalisations (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 31).

Alternatively, by considering Bourdieu's concept of distinct group *habitus* and cultural capital, Nedkvitne argues the elite possessed 'more' cultural capital as they potentially distinguished themselves from 'ordinary' people by expressing their "cultural skills", thus arising the question of whether religion could have served as a "mark of distinction" in Norse society in some instances (2009, p. 28).

In the case of Norway and Iceland, prior to 1153 the church's main message was obedience to the king and solidarity with the Christian community, however afterwards there is the general effort of pacification of Norse society, which was achieved through the internalization of new ethics both towards the elite and "fellow men" and is thus the more general agenda within which charity and care of the poor finds itself within (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 176). Another significant source, particularly exemplifying this trend, is the Norwegian and Icelandic collections of homilies (religious discourses), which include translations of foreign homilies—however their selection and translation ought to be indicative of expressions of the preaching of the church in this particular context (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 177). Such sources condemn systems of violence and revenge that were not "authorized" by the church and state, while peaceful legal proceedings were simultaneously praised (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 177). These efforts will be revisited alongside the social phenomena of honour codes and the role of blood feuds and violence within Norse society.

The ideology and practices regarding alms and aiding the poor as described by Nedkvitne (2009) recalls those discussed in Section 2.1. The church imposed poor relief by law ca. 1170, drawing a "sharp line" between the poor who were able and unable to earn their living or support themselves due to various impairments (such as illness, age, widowhood etc.)—or as has been previously described as the worthy or deserving poor (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 202). Similar to the 'social aid' described by Geremek (1994), peasants brought alms on holy days to be redistributed to the 'deserving' poor, while a quarter of church tithes were distributed to the poor as well (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 202). Although explicit financial transactions were not recorded, such poor relief was, in fact, put into practice. Nedkvitne cites the inclusion of general donations or gifts to the poor in the majority of wills to be distributed by priests from this period and finds of large

quantities of small coins lost beneath church floors as evidence of donations likely intended for a church's upkeep as well as alms (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 202). Similarly to Christian ideology on the continent regarding the economics of salvation, prayers for the 'donors' were expected in return from alm recipients. One could conceive the relationships created by the donations of alms as another link when mapping out the dependencies of Norse society. Furthermore, I would also argue that the pragmatism of giving alms should not be overstated, as room should be left for genuine internalization of Christian beliefs of love and empathy. Homilies did not simply preach what not to do and how to avoid sinning and eternal damnation, but also the ideals of Christian life—including the importance of love as a source of good and a bastion of defence against sin (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 178). Furthermore, the church preached charity to be the “highest of Christian virtues”, as can be exemplified by the following quote:

*“Those who are inspired by the Holy Spirit love their neighbours as much as themselves. They help not only their relatives but also foreigners, strangers and enemies.”*

- (*Gamalnorsk homiliebok* ed. Gustav Indrebø, Oslo 1931, p. 64 in Nedkvitne 2009, p. 201)

It should be stressed then, that the church or the introduction of Christianity did not introduce empathy and care for the poor, rather it was already a concept well internalised and practiced in society “as far back as our [written] sources permit us to see” (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 204). Instead, Christianity and the church adjusted this traditionally secular, community-organized care for the poor by giving it religious meaning and motivation. Consequently, the church lead extending care for the poor from just the local community to “an impersonal state society” level (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 205)—that is, individuals not within kinship groups, or not known first-hand, but were categorized under the umbrella definition of the poor (as discussed in Section 2.1). Nedkvitne (2009, p. 203) cites the *Law of Gulathing* in characterizing the way care for the poor was practiced before the strengthened influence of the church before the 12<sup>th</sup> century. As has been suggested before, care for the poor is related to the responsibility of individual households: firstly, it is conceived that the head of the household's responsibility is to provide for their members so that they do not need to ‘go begging’ in the first place. In the case that individuals or entire households were overwhelmed by poverty, their nearest relative would be responsible for taking them in their care, at times requiring households to split up as the husband and wife would

be taken in by their respective closest relatives (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 203). Absence of kinship released a peasant from the responsibility for the care of poor individuals placed in their care, thus they would either be sent to their previous household, or that of their true closest relative, or taken to the *thing* assembly where their fate would be decided or another household could volunteer to take them in (Nedkvitne 2009, p.203). Furthermore, the role of community solidarity is especially apparent with the “*fatoekra manna flutning*’ or movement of people” which, before being regulated by the law in 1274, was administered by peasants themselves and organized the rotation of poor people between houses for periods of different lengths “in proportion to the wealth of the household” (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 203; Miller 1990, p. 19). This ‘collective’ is referred to as the *hreppr*, which Miller (1990, p. 19) describes as an “administrative unit independent of chieftain-Thing structures”, which was made up of at least twenty households, and thus organized territorially. Their primary function was the organization of this movement of poor people, the collection and distribution of tithes and mandatory contributions to the poor, as well as the administration of an “insurance system” in case of fire, disease outbreaks or deaths of livestock (Miller 1990, p. 19). What remains unclear from this description is whether unfree individuals, or those of lower status than free peasants, were entitled to this social system of care. Perhaps the better question is whether they would have even needed this system at all considering their status as property. This question will be revisited in the discussion, after the nuances of free vs. unfree individuals are presented in the following section (3.1).

Joachymek (2019, p. 236) interprets the perception of poverty in medieval Iceland from the same primary sources as Miller i.e. *Grágás* , as something “dangerous and repulsive” which was “culturally rejected” in order for the survival of society. Although the analysis is far too brief and focused on the burden poor kinsmen and the responsibility of their care, there is something to be said about the efforts of medieval Icelandic legal systems to halt the “continuance of the impoverished household” (Miller 1990, p. 129). The responsibility of caring for the poor was split up between wealthier kin as impoverished households (families) were split up, and one of the forms through which children were fostered (i.e., poorer children handed over to the care of wealthier kinsmen), or forced people into debt slavery (Miller 1990, p. 129). Furthermore, such poor laws “imposed a definition of kin group on a person”, to which they were held accountable to either by fines or even lesser outlawry regardless of if the people they



were accountable for were counted into their individual definition of kin groups or not (Miller 1990, p. 154). Miller (1990, p. 148) goes on to say that debt-slavery was so tied to poverty in the legal administration of poverty relief that it likely continued after the decline of common slavery in medieval Iceland. It is hard to tell whether this system of helping the poor was due to the repulsion of poverty as Joachymek (2019) suggests, or merely a way of helping one's community through solidarity and conceived to be the best way of stopping future unfavourable living conditions. Seeing as it was likely a question of individual internalization of social norms as well as kinship ties, it is thus something both historians and archaeologists alike can likely only hypothesise about.

Of course, determining who was responsible for whom in the need for poor relief warrants some discussion on kinship degrees during this period. The "determination of liability" required both an assessment of property to determine whether one had the means to take on the responsibility of poor relief of their kin, and naturally a determination of kinship as well. Immediate kinship ties such as parents, children or in-laws are to be expected among these classifications, however, Miller (1990 p. 145) notes that fourth cousins seem to be a limit for kinship, for both poor laws and inheritance laws. There is also a maximum amount of illegitimate children kinsmen are required to be responsible for.<sup>2</sup> Miller also discusses practical kinship, thus considering the difference between it and more formal kinship which can be described legally. An individual can belong to various kin groups (especially post-marriage) thus factors such as loyalties, proximity, and maintenance of relationships as other determinants for the strengths of kinship, rather than degrees of genealogical relationship (Miller 1990, p. 157). Furthermore, "fictive kinship", such as fostering or sponsorial relationships (i.e., sponsoring baptism etc.), in another example of "practical kinship" which was at the core of group recruitment in "saga Iceland" (Miller 1990, pp. 174; 178).

Archaeologically, one of the ways such kinship can be approached is through considering the social significance of feasting. Both Zori et al. (2013) and Mainland et al. (2018) outline how feasts played an integral role in the establishment of both lordly power through patron-role feasts, or household-level friendships and co-operation through entrepreneurial feasting (Zori et al. 2013, 152; Mainland et al. 2018, p. 783). The ritualized and highly politicized practice of

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<sup>2</sup> For further legal nuances and complicated webs about financial responsibility and poor relief in relation to varying degrees of kinship, as well as complications due to bilateralism see (Miller 1990, pp. 147-157).

communal and conspicuous consumption (as established by Dietler 2010) is situated within the household, as relationship hierarchies are enforced or established through reciprocity (Zori et al. 2013, p. 152). Hauken (1991) points out how gift-giving might have played a similar role. Hedenstierna-Jonson (2009) notes the importance of feasting and drinking in sustaining loyalty and the building and maintenance of a group identity that was essential in founding of a “professional...fighting unit”, which can be loosely thought of as the ‘secret’ to the success of the Northern warrior (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2009, p. 54; Ashby 2015a, p. 101). This perspective highlights the potential importance feasting played in politics at both the micro and macro scale. It is significant to note however, that hosting feasts and gift giving, both seemingly essential aspects of social network maintenance and creation require a proportional amount of ‘wealth’ (in the sense that inter-household or farmstead feasts were not as bountiful as feasts hosted by the elite), thus further disadvantaging poorer individuals.

### 2.2.2 Sagas and other sources

Scholarship on the sagas also have a particular methodological approach and history that ought to be addressed briefly before discussing them further. Generally, sagas are categorized into two categories based on the time when the events that are described took place, however they were written by clerics and laymen from c. 1120-1350 CE (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 34). The first category is made up of sagas that describe events from 1100-1350 CE and were written less than two generations after the events described, while the second category includes sagas that describe events between roughly 870-1030 CE, however their stories were transmitted orally for around 200-400 years before they were written down (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 34). The bulk of these sagas are the *Islendingasögur*, from which many of the sources used in this section come from. Much of the content in sagas come from oral prose narratives and in their transmission between generations, as with many oral traditions, stories were “inevitably” transformed, forgotten, or combined with other stories—thus the borders between history and literature are “not clearly drawn” (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 35). Furthermore, sagas can be used methodologically as “relics” (or *levning* in Scandinavian historical methodology), thus being employed as a way of gaining knowledge about the author and his public—generally meaning not only the literary elite, but also “to some extent” of illiterate laymen (Nedkvitne 2009, p. 37).

In comparing an Icelandic interpretation of an anecdote describing Charlemagne's treatment of the poor, Joachymek (2019, p. 233) argues that the specific role of paupers described in this source resonated with a "Norse belief in social order where both king and beggar have their places pre-assigned by God", and further arguing that such ideas could be traced back to the Eddic poem of *Rígsþula*. This incomplete poem describes the travels of Rig (an alternative name for the god Heimdall) and the "mythical origins" of the different social orders (McDonald et al. 2010, p. 19). He visits three couples, thereby fathering the ancestors from all further social classes were descended from: the thralls (from Great-grandmother and Great-grandfather), commoners/freedmen (or karls from Grandmother and Grandfather), and noble elite (jarls from Mother and Father)(Crawford 2015, p. 145). The following verses describe Thrall:

*8. He grew and flourished.*

*On his hands he had*

*Wrinkled skin,*

*Knobby knuckles,*

*Thick fingers.*

*Ill favoured was his face,*

*Stooped his back,*

*long his heels.*

*9. More:*

*He began to exert his strength*

*binding bast [hemp, jute],*

*bundling up loads,*

*carrying home [bundles of sticks for fuel]*

*all the weary day.*

In the next verse the woman whom Thrall settles down with, Thir (or Thrallwoman) is described as:

*“a footloose girl  
With muddy soles,  
Sunburnt arms,  
And hooked nose.”*

Finally, their children are described in verse 12:

*“12. They had children,  
They taught them and loved them.  
I think their sons were named  
Lumpy and Barn-cleaner,  
Noisy and Horsefly  
Sleeper, Stinker,  
Midget, Fatboy,  
Slow and Grey-hair,  
Hunchback and Dangle-leg;  
they made fences,  
they planted fields,  
they raised pigs,  
they herded goats,  
they shoveled manure.*

*13. their daughters were  
Shorty and Fatty,  
Fat-calf  
And Beak-nose,  
Shriek and Slavegirl,  
Gossip,  
Skinny-hips,  
And Bird-legs.  
All the families of slaves*

*are descended from them.”*

In verses 15 and 16, Afi and Amma, the commoner couple directly translated to Grandfather and Grandmother, are described to be wood-carving and weaving, respectively, and wearing markedly better clothing (i.e. a “tailored shirt” or a “jewelled brooch”) (Crawford 2015, pp. 148-149). Their child, “Freeman”, is described as such:

*“20... He tamed oxen,  
He made a plow,  
he built houses  
and he built barns,  
he made wagons  
and drove a plow.”*

Freeman and his wife, “In-law”, also had children:

*“22. ... Their sons were Manful and Fighter,  
Brave, Swordsman, and Smith,  
Stout, Farmer,  
Trimbeard,  
Rancher and Husband,  
Sharp-Beard and Manly.*

*23. And they had daughters  
with the names:  
Smart, Bride, Swan,  
Lady, Dame,  
Girl, Noblewoman, Wife,  
Shy, and Vivacious.  
All the families of free farmers  
are descended from them.”*

Although I would argue that Joachymek (2019, p. 233) describes too rigid a society via the *Rígsþula*, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to conduct a comprehensive source criticism of this Eddic poem. Nonetheless, throughout this thesis, evidence that Viking Age society was comprised of more than three rigid classes will be presented continuously and is opposed to the theoretical perspective of intersectionality that has been presented in Section 1.3. What is significant for this thesis specifically, especially with the translation provided, are the translated names of the children and grandchildren of Rig and the different couples, seeing as they hint at different tasks and occupations *associated* to different classes. Both Thrall and Freedman's sons are listed to have had some farm tasks. However, Freedman, In-law, and their sons are also associated to the more skillful tasks of home-making, such as the acts of building homes, barns, plows and wagons as well as driving them. In-law is also described as a "housewife with her keys" (verse 21) – symbolism that has often been discussed in terms of female authority over the household (Wicker 2012). Alternatively, Thrall and his family is associated with more menial tasks around the farm, such as the care of lower-status animals (goats and pigs, as compared to Freedman's taming of oxen), shoveling manure, field planting and fence-making. Both groups of daughters have no occupations associated to them. It is significant that Freedman's children are named after more skilled, honorable qualities, his sons linked to warriors and masculinity, while the daughters are linked to qualities related to marriage (which Thrall's daughters notably are not, yet the sexual or romantic relationships between free and unfree individuals will be discussed further in Section 3.1 and 3.4). Thrall and his family are named after generally 'undesirable' qualities (stinky, slow, noisy, hunchback or horsefly for instance) or oftentimes close to physical disabilities, which is perhaps to be expected when stylistically describing a social class that is subjugated.

The importance of social networks, kinships bonds and other forms of dependencies cannot be stressed enough, namely because it could be said they constituted the social fabric of society. Thus, it goes without saying that exile was one of the most severe forms of punishment in the Viking Age in general (Eriksen 2019, p. 123). By using the *Hälsingeland law*, a fourteenth century law code from Sweden, as an example Eriksen (2019, p. 125) points out that the severity of this punishment, being "locked out" of settled areas and excluded from your community and being relegated to living in the wilderness outside of settled areas. Through this perspective,

Eriksen (2019, p. 124) argues for an ontology where settlements are perceived as areas of social control and regulations, whereas individuals that were banished not only lived outside of society, but also outside of the law. This not only made them vulnerable due to the loss of a social support system, but it also meant that they could be killed on sight by anyone (Eriksen 2019, p. 124). Besides the individual cost of becoming an exile and the loss of a social support system not to mention a sort of liminal existence in society, Cochrane (2002) also points out that such individuals also had no loyalties or responsibilities in turn and were thus understandably perceived as potentially threatening from this perspective.

Within the Icelandic sagas specifically, Cochrane (2002, p. 44) points out that vagrants were almost exclusively portrayed in a negative light, with characteristics such as “scurrilous, mercenary, treacherous, manipulative” and without any significant social or kinship networks. Although, Cochrane remains skeptical about how much such depictions say about historical attitudes towards vagrancy, largely due to their “usefulness” as plot devices in saga narratives mostly as instigators of feuds and conflict (Cochrane 2002, p. 44). Based on legal sources, vagrants are distinct from individuals who ‘qualified’ for poor laws or help from the *hreppr* traveled on account of *ómennska* (translated as “unmanliness, sloth or even inhumanity”), not the farmer who traveled due to impoverishment or unfortunate circumstances and were thus in need of work and care. Once again, the theme of worthy and unworthy poor comes up in the ontology of poverty.

Outside of the *hreppr*, Cochrane draws attention to the *fardagar* ‘moving days’, or a period of four days established specifically for the movement of individuals across the countryside in search of better ‘job prospects’ or opportunities, while movement outside of this period would have been perceived as suspicious according to saga material (Cochrane 2002, p. 46). Similar to



Figure 2. Rörbro runestone (Sm 37). English translation of inscription is as follows: "Qzurr made these monuments in memory of Eyndr/Hvittr, his father. He was the most unvillainous of men; was liberal with food and oblivious". Original photo by Nilsson, Pål-Nils. S.

the Swedish laws regarding outlaws cited by Eriksen (2019, p.123), there is similarly little tolerance for vagrancy in the Icelandic material, as the absence of penalty for the injury of vagrants, or their lost claims of inheritance (which is not surprising, as they are presumably characterised by their absence of social ties) are also matched by the illegality of offering food and housing to vagrants strongly discourages their presence (Cochrane 2002, p. 46).

A final mention about another written source, is regarding runestones. Although the erection of runestones was not an exclusively Christian phenomenon, “the habit spread rapidly at the time of conversion (Sawyer and Sawyer 1993, p.5).” The role of women in conversion process is notable, as wealthy women often built churches and bridges has been used to argue for the importance and autonomy women had in Viking Age societies, however I would also argue that it is also reflective of the permeance and interpretation within existing world beliefs of the Christian ideology of charity. Such runestones (*Fig.3.*)(*see also* Sö 30, and Sö 134 runestones) are simply described as a display of status and wealth (Wicker 2012, p. 246), but they could also



*Figure 3. Sö101 Ramsundsberget, Jäder Runestone. Inscription translated to English is as follows: “Sigríðr, Alríkr's mother, Ormr's daughter, made this bridge for the soul of Holmgeirr, father of Sigröðr, her husbandman.” Photo originally by: Lundberg, Bengt A.*



be interpreted as a 'selfless' act of charity and potentially an internalization of Christian ideology regarding poverty by both male and female founders of such runestones. Multiple runestones such as the Rörbro runestone (*Fig.3*)(*see also* Sö 275, Sm39, Dr 291runestones) in whose inscriptions praise an individual's generosity with food. Such acts can of course be read within the discourse on the importance of feasting in establishing and maintaining social networks within Viking Age societies, but I would argue it could also be interpreted as another manifestation of internalized Christian ideologies.

### 3. Society and Its Hierarchies

In this section the various social hierarchies and identities of the Viking Age will be discussed through existing archaeological research, specifically focusing on lower class hierarchies. Although ideas of slavery and free and unfree tenants has been briefly discussed from Icelandic medieval codes in the previous section, this chapter will present a more comprehensive outline of society. Existing archaeological research on slavery and migration, age, illness, gender, and occupations and professions as identity will be presented in this section to discuss how various identities overlapped and whether particular constellations of such identities made certain individuals more vulnerable to poverty. It should be noted that the purpose of this section is to provide concrete tools based on archaeological evidence which can later be applied to the case studies.

#### 3.1. Slavery

When addressing lower class hierarchies, the topic of slavery seems a prominent one to address. The discussion of slavery is quite broad in the archaeology of the Viking Age, especially in recent years. Raffield (2019) addresses the how archaeology of slavery, specifically slave markets can be an “archaeology of the invisible”, partially due to the absence of the active practice of slave taking and trading. He places these acts in various locations rather than a distinct ‘slave market’, including harbours, residences, or seasonal markets for instance (2019, p. 690). The archaeology of poverty can perhaps be thought of in a similar way: a concrete reality of society, however spread out through various “activity zones” and thus not discretely identifiable. Recent research from osteological materials has also contributed important stuff for this, as aDNA techniques have been employed not only in the investigation of migration but also the ‘involuntary’ migration that was a product of slaving. More specifically, Price et al.’s (2014) study of the cemetery at Galgedil used strontium isotope and genomic analysis to consider differences in diet between non-locals as well as between sexes. Such data allows the authors to isolate individuals who were likely slaves, “a segment of the population otherwise often anonymous in the archeological record”, not only due to the differences in diet but the contexts in which they were buried (Price et al. 2014, p. 141). The study found that the nitrogen isotope ratio showed a significant difference between male and female graves, as well as from a few

individuals from double graves or that have been deemed non-local which have been interpreted as slaves or unfree individuals (Price et al. 2014, p. 141). Broadly speaking, the individuals that were surveyed in this study showed that slaves and women consumed less terrestrial meat in their diet.

It is also important to note that Viking Age society was not merely split into free and unfree individuals, as both categories contain their own subsequent hierarchies, and specifically between the unfree, certain ambiguities have been discussed. For instance, Brink (2008, p. 3) discusses the title of *bryti* which has been defined as an unfree servant, steward or bailiff. This title seems to have changed from its “original function” (according to legal sources) of an individual who was delivering food amongst the slaves, to a “attendant among the slaves on a farm”, to a bailiff, and by the late Middle Ages into a tenant. Alongside etymological discourses, Brink (2008) states that *bryti* nonetheless likely referred to a bound steward and slave who was in charge of slaves’ household and food. Thus, between a slave owner and their slaves, the *bryti* seems to have had a different, perhaps higher, status due to the responsibilities he would have had. Placed on an equal status as *bryti* was the female status of *deigja*, meaning “milkmaid, housekeeper, but also concubine” (Brink 2008, p. 6). When considered alongside Raffield et al.’s (2017) discussion on concubines and internal household hierarchies between wives and concubines (which will be addressed further), the status of *deigja* is consistent with interpretations of female household hierarchies. Although not strictly thralldom, it is worth remembering the complicated status of freed slaves or dependent families, such as those assigned by the hreppr for instance. Such individuals could have been servants, wet-nurses, manual labourers or a part of the *comitatus* or warrior-band system (Eriksen 2019, p. 76).

When it comes to identifying slaves within the household, Eriksen’s (2019, p. 86) in-depth analysis of the experience of living in Viking Age settlements and longhouses provides a critical intervention. Specifically within the longhouse, attention is drawn to the possibilities of “rooms beyond the byre” (*Fig. 4*) which are spaces associated to the byre and lived in by the household’s dependents or thralls (*ibid.*). In the plan showed in *Fig. 4*, this space had one of three hearths in this longhouse, which Eriksen (*ibid.*) further interprets as a food preparation room, tasks that are often associated to slave labour in written sources. Roslund (2020) argues that a cultural identity of female thralls of Slavic origin can be expressed through pottery styles, furthermore presenting how changes and adaptation of Slavic ceramic wares in the Lake Mälaren valley provide a

unique source of considering the movements of slaves and the hybridization of their culture between settlements in the late Viking Age to High Medieval periods (2007, p. 280).

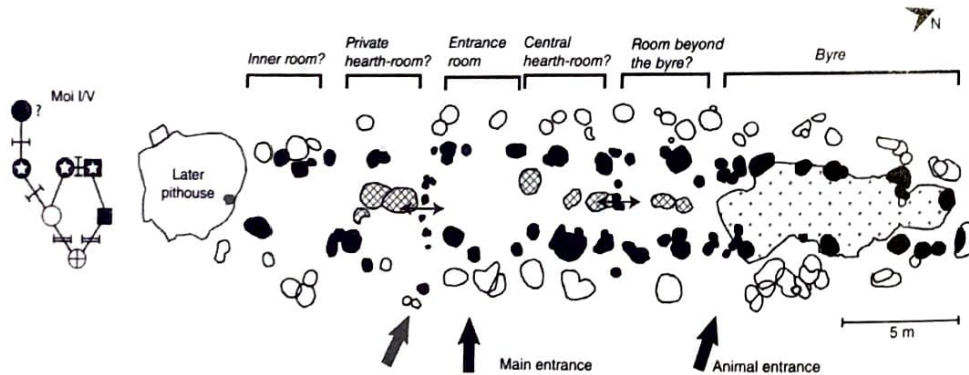


Figure 4. "The longhouse at Moi IV with socio-spatial interpretation". Visualization of the "room beyond the byre". Original image from (Eriksen 2019, p.98).

Skre (2001, p. 7) brings up a useful parallel between the organisation of farms in contemporaneous Northern Germany, hypothesising that a similar kind of organization occurred in Norse region partially due to use of slaves in Iceland to run farms. Estates in Northern Germany were divided into smaller farms called *mansi* to be run by tenants and their households. Tenants could have included freemen, manumitted slaves, or in some cases could have been run by a slave and their household, "with the prospect of being given freedom" (ibid.). However, future generations of freed slaves were still tied up in dependencies as their hereditary title of former slave also entailed "obligations of service and loyalty to his former owner and his heir" (ibid.). Similar "interstitial statuses tainted by slavery" are also present in Icelandic legal codes as freed individuals who died without an inheritor ceded their property to their manumitter or their heirs (however the manumitter would also be responsible for their "destitute freedmen" in cases of impoverishment) (Miller 1990, p. 27).

In regards to burial evidence, slaves have, of course, been discussed within double burials (within the cemeteries at Kaupang, multiple double burials within boat graves have been documented)(Raffield et al. 2017b; Price et al. 2014; Skre et al. 2007). However, when it comes to the individual burial of thralls, Skre (2001, p.10) describes a stark image—in that the burial of a slave is near "unthinkable." According to Skre (ibid.) the "mental image" of a slave from this period is that of an individual that was not truly a member of society, highlighting their liminal status as humans, and more akin to that of an animal, thus making it likely that their remains were commonly treated "probably like those of a dead horse or cow", further drawing attention

to Ibn Fadlan’s accounts that describe a “dead slave’s body left for dogs and birds of prey to eat”. Such perspectives prompt reconsiderations into whether human remains are found in middens or other waste disposal events as a way of understanding whether archaeological evidence can back up such scenarios.

Alternatively, burials that exhibit individuals haphazardly thrown into a burial pit (i.e., skeletal remains indicate individuals were lying on their stomachs, face down, with possibility of tied limb(s), little to no accompanying artefacts or coffins, and sometimes exhibiting sign of violence) have been interpreted to be anything from burials of criminals to those of thralls (sometimes called deviant burials)(Stylegar 2007, p. 90; Arcini 2018, pp. 13-17, 92)(Fig. 5.) Interestingly, it seems that the majority of these individuals have been sexed as males. Arcini (2018, p. 90) also argues that face-down burials could be attempts to exclude individuals from a community, thus interpreted as a sign of humiliation or punishment, or could reflect the particular social make-up of urban spaces, as a collective of people without immediate families of social support networks that would have normally been responsible for an individual’s burial. Stylegar (2007, p. 90) attributes the predominance of males in thrall burials as the local community “importing” thralls to account for the lack of “considerable” men who were absent due to Viking activities.



*Figure 5. Male remains from Fjälkinge, Sweden. An example of individuals buried face down or “carelessly dumped in.” This particular grave was dug too small—thus the legs are slightly bent. No grave goods or personal finds were found with this individual. Original photo by Bertil Helgesson, Kristianstad Museum (in Arcini 2018, 16).*

### 3.2 Age

Eriksen (2017) mentions that little is known about childscapes in the Viking Age, and further suggest that personhood ought to be considered to begin with social birth, rather than physical birth, as infants and neonates potentially occupied a liminal stage of being (Eriksen 2017, pp. 340-341,351). Eriksen (2017, p. 352) argues that infants, animals, and slaves or unfree populations might have experienced a third way of being—a potential “betweenness” as “sentient and agential” beings or animate objects in Iron-Age ontologies. Eriksen describes a liminal state between being sentient and agential “with limited independent agency”, and bearing the treatment as an object that was “exploited” for labour, food (in the case of animals), or sacrifice as “particularly powerful objects to be devoted to the house or gods”(Eriksen 2017, p. 351). Although this is not to undermine the love parents would have had for their children, Eriksen (2017, p. 341) contextualises this argument within a social ontology that would have had various views on what a human could *be*, namely due to the very presence of unfree populations, the lack of punishment for killing slaves as well as their brutal treatment and can be exemplified by the equating of slaves to cattle. Although Icelandic law codes did not make a distinction in the value of *wergild* inherently on status (in theory at least), it was instead decided by the social standing of the victim, as well as the wealth and power of their kin (Miller 1990, p. 27).

On the topic of poor laws discussed in Section 2.2, another facet related to this was the social contract of fostering of children. Miller (1990, pp. 124-126) discusses three relationships of fostering. The first describes the fostering of children to a lower status foster parents than their original household (as a “mulct”), the second was between households of equivalent standing and largely acted as a way of forming or maintaining social networks, while the third was part of the responsibility or obligation kinsmen had towards their poorer relatives. In this third kind of adoption, upon transitioning to adulthood “the bond that attached them to their new household” oftentimes changed from fosterage to service (Miller 1990, p. 125).

Lewis-Simpson (2008) also considers that both old age and childhood were stages where individuals were viewed as marginal figures, as they provided little function to society in their dependent state (Lewis-Simpson 2008, 10; Clover 1993, 380; Mejsholm 2009, p. 252). Older men in particular are mentioned to be regarded negatively (Lewis-Simpson 2008, 13). Considered alongside Clover’s (1993) point that masculinity is defined by qualities that can be

lost or gained, and that old men were associated with femaleness and consequently a condition of powerlessness (Clover 1993, 383), the loss of status with age is entirely likely.

### 3.3. Illness and Disability

Illness and disability are easily associated with our preconceptions of historic (or perhaps even current) ideas of poverty—for instance as the image of the maimed or ill medieval beggar comes to mind. It thus ought to be recognized that in some cases illness and disability acted as catalysts in either lowering an individual's status or leading them to fall into poverty. There is also a cyclical relationship between illness and poverty, as there are also illnesses that were made worse or caused by poverty or insufficient living conditions, for instance the vulnerability or frailty caused by malnutrition, exposure, dangerous work environments, or access to sanitation is especially stressed in increasingly urbanized environments and the development of poorer neighbourhoods.

Here the osteological record provides significant insight both into the prevalence of illnesses and disability, but also allows for interpretations of whether such individuals were cared for by their society. Healed battle trauma, everyday accidents, as well as congenital conditions or those arising from old age (such as arthritis) that would have rendered certain movements impossible, would have thus impacted living conditions and an individual's need for assistance for either basic everyday tasks or the ability to carry out their 'professions' (Arcini 2018, pp. 60-62). Examples of two interred individuals with dwarfism and the absence of differences between their burial and other individuals without dwarfism at Skämsta cemetery, as well as their survival into adulthood and the fact that their "handicap was not an impediment to marriage, since there was more than one of them" (finding it unlikely that they were an example of two separate mutations), is interpreted to indicate the care and acceptance in Viking Age society (at the very least in their mode of burial)(*ibid.*). Another individual with dwarfism in Kopparsvik in Gotland was buried with their clothing, which included two rings and brooches (Arcini 2018, p. 67) and are also potentially indicative of a higher status generally associated with such finds. I would thus argue that such individuals do not directly indicate a complete acceptance of disabled individuals but is rather an example of the strength of social networks for 'surviving' in society.

Leprosy is a highly visible and oftentimes debilitating disease, causing paralysis of muscles and loss of feeling, thus making injuries and infections more likely, as well as the

regression of extremities. It is difficult to estimate the prevalence of leprosy in Scandinavia between 500-900 CE due to the prevalence of cremation burials, however Arcini (2018, p. 68) points out that the majority of individuals with the earliest cases of leprosy in the Trinitatis cemetery in Lund (material from the part of the churchyard used in Arcini's study covers the periods 990-1050/60 CE) are found on the edges of the cemetery, which indicates that lepers were among the groups of people that could not choose the plot of their graves. Although, in other cemeteries such as Kopparsvik or Löddeköpinge they are found both on the peripheries and near the churchyard, thus leading to the conclusion that "their placing does not say anything about their social status" (Arcini 2018, p. 68). Although further research into the treatment and care of lepers during their lifetime (and before the establishment of hospitals) can be said is needed, it is also unclear whether lepers had no say over their burial plots due to a lack of finances, surviving relatives that would see to their burial or ideological reasons that kept them on the peripheries of the churchyard. However, a similar argument as about individuals with dwarfism may be made, in that their prolonged survival with a debilitating disease highlights the importance of social and kinship networks.

### 3.4. Gender

The topic of gender is quite a broad discussion in Viking Age studies, thus this section is by no means a comprehensive summary of gender in the Viking Age, but rather isolating some aspects that have not been already touched upon in order to frame how gender explicitly functions within intersectional experience of the subaltern. Gendered labour and workspaces have been increasingly addressed in archaeological literature. Both Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. (2013) and Sundman et al. (2013) consider whether gender-specific work spaces can be identified in Birka, and if so what the implications were. Furthermore, both note that gendered workzones are a unique feature of this proto-town, which can perhaps be attributed to the town's function as a trading post, and thus a regular absence of men (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2014, p.184; Sundman et al. 2013, p. 4464). The poor lifestyle conditions tied to indoor workzone and poor air quality can be seen in a higher rate of sinusitis in female remains that can only be seen at Birka, and not the surrounding rural environment of Mälars Valley or the more medieval town of Sigtuna (Sundman et al. 2013, p. 4464). Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. (2014) go on to say that despite the poorer health and possibly shorter lifespan, this unique urban environment allowed



women more opportunities for power, namely in trade, textile production or religious positions for example (Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2014, p. 198; cf. Dommasnes 1991, p. 71). Furthermore, Myrdal (2011, p. 297), makes the point that legal and cultural sources suggest that in the rural sphere, certain tasks were associated with female slaves, such as milking or grinding grain, while the role of servants and slaves as wetnurses are also mentioned (Eriksen 2019, p. 76). Roslund (2020, p. 262, *see also* Roslund 2007) has also argued that pottery production was maintained by women, particularly unfree female members of Slavic origin within Viking Age households.

Raffield et al. (2017b) suggests that simply looking at gender through power relationships, consequently leaves little room for interpersonal relationships, and thus the negotiations of power and control, are to be considered (*ibid.*, p. 167). In shifting the focus from exceptional examples of women and described forms of equality (such as participation in trade, warrior culture and legal proceedings), Raffield et al. (*ibid.*, p. 197) considers the sexual inequality at play as women and slaves were commodified especially in polygynous households and with concubinage. Although there is evidence of “numerous grades” of concubines with complicated, potentially abusive relationships within the household (*ibid.*, p. 194), the aspect of this practice that is most relevant to this thesis topic is that of the commodification of women. Raffield et al. (*ibid.*, p. 180-182) discusses the placing of daughters into concubinage as form of bartering and social mobility, as well as the connection between the taking of female slaves for the purpose of obtaining concubines or brides.

Miller briefly mentions that servants would have been “in fertile concubinage” (1990, p.123). A “good portion” of the permanent servants in a household were poorer relatives (with consequently poor prospects of marriage considering laws regulating minimum amount of property for marriage) both in need of household attachment and part of the responsibility of kinsmen due to poor laws discussed in section 2.2 (*ibid.*, p.122). Once again there is a distinction between male and female workers when, according to the Icelandic sagas, even the poorest households had at least one female servant, while male servants at least 12 years old granted their ‘employer’ the title of *einvirki* or “sole-worker” (*ibid.*).

A final consideration on the topic of masculinity must be presented in this discussion of gender. An unequal ratio of men and women within urban spaces has been addressed by osteological, settlement and more general Viking Age research. Barrett (2008, p. 681) discusses the internalized structures of an increasingly militarized society and consequent violent

competition, alongside an influx of silver and a “surplus” of young men in need of sufficient bride price as the key motives that led to the beginning of the Viking Age (Barrett 2008, p. 681). Ashby (2015a, p. 93) further considers the significance of social capital or “status fever”, rather than simply physical value of loot acquired through raiding (Ashby 2015a, p. 93), where status and the prospect of group formation through raiding activity prove to be convincing incentives. Alongside a multitude of culturally specific circumstances, Raffield et al. (2017a) also argue that a contributing factor to the Viking Age is an unequal ratio of men to women. In combination with the practice of polygyny and concubinage, which even when practiced by a small portion of society, creates a large impact (ibid., p. 318), and an increasingly hierarchical society, evolutionary anthropology and ethnographic analogy permits the probabilistic outcome of men partaking in riskier behaviour, such as raiding (ibid., pp. 319-320).

### 3.5 Occupations and professions as identity in Urban spaces

The archaeology of urban sites in Scandinavia is deeply characterized by craft and trading activities (Skre 2007, p. 45), and these are primarily the individuals that ‘people’ the knowledge that is produced from the archaeological record. It is thus worth considering existing research on the identity of craftworkers, and what can or has been said about existing professions.

It is worth beginning with Ashby’s (2015b, p.11) problematization of the way the label of itinerant is used, in that this lifestyle has not been discussed, characterized, or described, merely identified, and used as a label without much elaboration. Ashby (ibid.) critiques the ways of determining intensity of production (i.e. through rigid quantitative methodology), and proposes instead that Costin’s (1991 *in* Ashby 2015b, p. 16) holistic approach of regarding the other kinds of activities undertaken at a particular site is more appropriate. Costin (1991 *in* Ashby 2015, p. 16) further challenges the dichotomy of determining between specialist and non-specialist activity by pointing out that craftworkers could have been specialized to different degrees. Ashby (2015, pp. 19; 24-25) provides a typology of four models of craft activity through the characterization of mobility and organization, which communicate the various degrees of itinerancy (*Fig. 6*). These models are established based on the connections through which materials were sourced, thus resulting in three possible scenarios: materials were either (1) brought to market by craftworkers, (2) a result of local resourcing through personal connections,

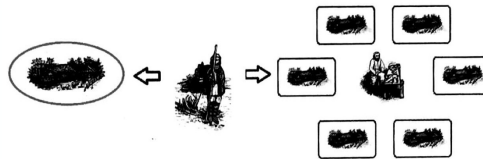
or (3) local resourcing provided by an organized supply upon arrival at a site. For crafts requiring bulky or heavy materials that would be impractical to transport (e.g. metalworking), either local connections or well-administered nexuses (such as early urban settlements) are necessary. Ashby (ibid., p.19) presents the small-scale peripatetic craftworker, or “community artisan,” whose local knowledge or contacts were used to secure materials (i.e. scenarios 2 and 3) was necessary in order to be welcomed within a site, as well as produce and sell. Such individuals could be described within both the frequent or seasonal mobility models, as they likely had a “rural homebase,” and might have done agricultural or other work during the year “to secure a stable

**Sedentary Craft**



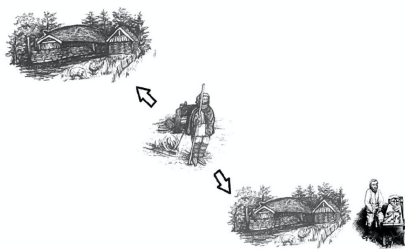
**Base:** Market Site  
**Mobility Level:** Sedentary  
**Flexibility:** Full-time OR Part-time; various methods of organisation  
**Key Market:** Inhabitants of Market Settlement  
**Other Markets:** Visitors from hinterland, and from further afield if site is a key entrepot

**Seasonal Mobility**



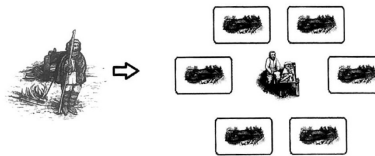
**Base:** Away from market site  
**Mobility Level:** Small-scale. 'Trade visits' made to local market, returning regularly to homebase.  
**Flexibility:** Full-time OR part-time; various methods of organisation  
**Key Market:** Inhabitants of market settlement  
**Other Markets:** Visitors from hinterland, or from further afield if site is a key entrepot (most will be)

**Frequent Mobility**



**Base:** Away from market site  
**Mobility Level:** Small-scale. 'Trade visits' made to local market, returning regularly to homebase  
**Flexibility:** Full-time OR part-time; various methods of organisation  
**Key Market:** Inhabitants of market settlement  
**Other Markets:** Visitors from hinterland; visitors from further afield if site is a key entrepot

**True Itinerancy**



**Base:** None  
**Mobility Level:** Large-scale; permanently travelling on circuit, throughout the year  
**Flexibility:** Full-time  
**Key Market:** Inhabitants of various market settlements  
**Other Markets:** Visitors from hinterland of each market settlement; visitors from further afield if site is a key entrepot

Figure 6. Ashby's (2015, pp. 24-25) typology of craft activities.

income” (Ashby 2015, p. 19). Such artisans are thought to have moved to and from different towns or marketplaces in the summer months or lived at a property for the season in larger, permanent towns (such as Kaupang for instance), potentially leaving behind some family members as they did so (ibid., p. 19). This model (seasonal or frequent mobility) corresponds particularly well to crafts that are inherently tied to the rural landscape—such as antler working due to the nature of sourcing raw material. Research into itinerant craftworkers allows us to consider craftspeople within the subaltern, and similarly account for the fact that these individuals may not have been as ‘free’ as the label suggests.

Linna’s (2015) study strongly challenges the perceived freedom of the itinerant craftworker as

she points out that the unfree craftworker is “well-known” to have been a part of Viking Age societies, citing a few runestones that express “the gratitude of freed craftworkers” to the masters who had granted their freedom—such as the Hørning runestone (DR 58) (Fig. 7). This is not to say that all craftworkers were unfree, but rather highlight a complex scale of freedom between craftworkers as “free entrepreneurs and unfree thralls” (Linna 2015, p.70). The complex scale between free and unfree individuals has been discussed in previous chapters, and it is worth considering how such nuances of hierarchies were further reflected in craftworking.

Linna’s (ibid.) study shows us how the unfree craftworker can be investigated through the mapping of power relations of settlement and dwelling organization. For Linna (ibid., p. 70), the powerlessness of an unfree craftworker is characterized by their transformation from mediators of materials into intermediaries “mindlessly passing on materiality” and “deprived” of an ability to influence their production and the materials they work with—thus examining degrees of spatial organization, patterns of waste disposal, and geographic or symbolic distance to settlement centres to study the control such individuals had over their spaces. Thus, power



*Figure 7. Hørning runestone (DR 58). English translation of inscription reads as follows: "Tóki Smith raised the stone in memory of Þorgísl Guðmundr's son, who gave him gold(?) and freedom."*

over production can be assessed through considering a central location, a high degree of spatial organization in waste disposal, a wide range of produced types and an efficient use of raw materials. Absence of such criteria indicates “actions of a weak or subordinate craftworker” (ibid., p.71). In the case study of a workshop near Viborg Søndersø in Denmark, the stark difference between waste disposal in the vicinity of the workshop and the waste disposed by the workshop, a decentralized location near a latrine (less than a metre away), an inefficient use of material, and a limited range of products leads Linaa (ibid., p. 85) to conclude that the individual within this workshop was a “controlled producer”(i.e. producing to order). This study further suggests that it remains difficult to determine whether this craftworker travelled to early urban centres during the summer months to continue their production. Such a conclusion ties in nicely to Ashby’s (2015) models of itinerant craftworkers (*Fig. 6*), and expands the possibilities in identifying the heterogenous groups of people that would have been present in urban spaces. Although beyond the scope (and methodology) of this thesis, similar kinds of spatial and waste disposal analysis provide an exciting point of future research within urban sites in order to determine whether similar patterns of powerscapes and mindscapes can be identified within an urban space. Furthermore, this scenario of the dependent craftworker is an example of how individuals of all statuses participated in the production of social order, thus participating in their own subordination (Pauketat et al. 2000).

Within Kaupang specifically, the research on non-ferrous metalworking can provide some insight into how craft production might have looked like within an urban centre. Non-ferrous metalwork took place in several parts of Kaupang, along with trade and other craft and domestic activities—and was thus “accordingly well integrated into daily life (Pedersen 2015, p. 54). Pedersen (2015; *see also* Pedersen 2010) has determined that there was no metalworking district, as various buildings exhibited signs of metalworking (from contemporary contexts). The concentration of workshop waste also suggests that craftspeople carried out their tasks within the house they dwelled in, and furthermore that the amount of waste indicates short events of casting activities. Pedersen (2015, p. 54) argues this indicates that some craftworkers at Kaupang might have been “guests in the house.” Furthermore, non-ferrous metalworking is “unquestionably group-work,” as someone had to operate the bellows to reach the heat required for working gold, silver, and copper alloys for instance (ibid., p. 57). This skill is not only easy to master, but supposedly also offers an “ideal position from which to observe the master in action” (ibid.).

Reconstructions have concluded that a workshop was likely comprised of 2-3 members, with different individuals responsible for different tasks that required both highly skilled and relatively unskilled labour (ibid.). The quality and provenance of the materials, as well as the use and knowledge of local materials, namely clay, used in production poses a few interesting scenarios of who the craftworkers would have been: either highly skilled and mobile metalworkers, with the added possibility that a local worker was “hired” (or perhaps I may add ‘rented’ if we are to consider thralls within these spaces) to do the less skilled, simple tasks and provide knowledge of local materials, however a “local master” with a permanent base in town is another likely scenario (see frequent or seasonal mobility models *Fig. 6*) (ibid., p.63).

Additionally, in their discussion of 12<sup>th</sup> century itinerant craftworkers in Bergen, Hansen (2015, p. 29) also describes workshops and apprentices to have comprised of different age groups, as these skills were taught through practice or apprenticeship. Hansen (ibid.) brings attention to the presence of children, pointing out that in pre-modern societies (as exemplified by 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century sources), children as young as six participated in craft production or sales trips. Similarly, Pedersen (2015, p.63) provides an example of a crucible used in non-ferrous metalwork that was made by a tiny finger, more likely attributed to a woman or a teenage, than a fully grown man. It is also possible that the production of crucibles would have been a female task, especially since pottery production has so readily been attributed as a female craft (Pedersen 2015, p. 63; Roslund 2007), further highlighting that various individuals would have been involved in the activities within a workshop.

## 4. Case Study: Kaupang and Looking for Poverty in Viking Age Urban Settlements

Before taking a closer look at the case study, a brief summary of how urban settlements are characterized, how they have been studied in previous archaeological research and consequently the kind of knowledge that has been produced will be presented. In section 4.1, pertinent material from Kaupang will be presented and discussed in light of the theoretical approaches presented in section 1.3, the historical context provided in chapter 2, and the evidence and approaches that have been used by existing scholarship to investigate social hierarchies in chapter 3.

Archaeological research into early urban contexts has primarily focused on creating and identifying characteristics of towns that distinguish them from rural settlements (Biddle 1976, pp. 99-100), as well as chronologies and stratigraphical sequences of sites in hopes of grasping the process of urbanisation (ten Herkel et al. 2013, p. vii-x). Additionally, economic significance generally remains central to most research questions, as trade, craft production, and relationships with surrounding countryside's are analysed. As previously mention, too little attention has been directed towards the social aspects of these early towns, or more specifically, the lived experience of individuals that inhabited these spaces—or as Hadley and ten Herkel (2013; p. x) phrase it, this research focus has meant that “the human element of these early towns , so important to their growth and development, has been often entirely removed...[which] has resulted in discussions of towns full of artifacts and structures but devoid of people, resulting in a kind of empty townscape.” To consider how the subaltern could be identified or approached within the city, questions regarding what groups of individuals would have inhabited urban spaces, as well as their status will be addressed.

Briefly summarizing some characteristics and the research history of early urban archaeology is necessary for understanding why looking for the subaltern can pose such a challenge, as well as how such questions are in-line with recent academic directions. Although early urban research, such as Biddle's rigid characteristics of Anglo-Saxon towns has been critiqued and doubted by academics for some of its evolutionary and processualist elements (Griffiths 2013, p. 3), their influence as well as the general focus on identifying distinct urban characteristics is still tangible. Planned street-systems, a market, legal autonomy, defences, complex religious organization, a role as a central place, and a relatively large population are

some of the criteria Biddle lists, (1976, p. 99-100 *in* ), and are often still addressed or considered by researchers when discussing distinctions between urban and rural spaces, as they are broadly perceived to be unique urban characteristics. Another aspect of research in medieval urbanization in consequence of the preoccupation with categorizing settlements as urban based on identifiable features, has been the focus on the progress of identified proto-urban towns towards the “natural climax” of the ‘proper’ medieval town, which can be attributed to the “principal concern” with the town as an economic entity (Astill 2009, pp. 258-9).

More recently, Hedenstierna-Jonson (2016) considers characteristics used to identify towns which are modeled after modern contexts and are partially applicable to Viking Age proto-towns, such as Birka, for distinguishing between urban and rural settings. These include “population density, an economy dominated by non-agricultural work, legal and administrative criteria and functionality” (Hedenstierna-Jonson 2016, p. 30). Specifically for studies of northern European early urbanism, its urbanism is deeply tied to its nature as an economic “phenomenon” (Wickham 2005, p. 593). Appropriately, it is also considered that for a town to be considered a town, its economy must be largely comprised of non-agricultural activities (Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991, p. 158 *in* Croix 2020b, p. 118). Considering the variety of specialized activities, namely trade and craft production that were undertaken in urban spaces, these areas must thus also reflect communities that “did not produce the main part of the foodstuffs for [their] own subsistence” (Croix 2020b, 118). However, the proximity and presence of animal husbandry and agrarian character of its immediate surroundings should not be undermined and will be discussed further in the case studies. Due to growing attention towards the dependent relationships between urban and rural settlements, there has been a shift away from viewing the two as dichotomous (Griffiths 2013, p. 4). Focusing on the urban-rural dynamic tends to have a polarizing effect, as in the example of undermining a town’s agricultural involvement (Astill 2009, p. 265). In the context of Anglo-Saxon or Viking Age town in Britain, groups of fields and commons that sustained the towns they surrounded, formed “important intermediary zone[s]”, in a system that did not match the “formalized and controlled” interrelationships seen in some European cities on the continent (Astill 2009, p. 265). Another topic of discourse that coincidentally brings up the topic of stakeholders, at least in the Anglo-Saxon context specifically, yet also within a Scandinavian one, is that of the aristocratic elites’ role as “initiator[s] and dominant consuming group in towns” (Astill 2009, p. 260; Sinbæk 2007, p.



128). Towns have been interpreted as a part of developing power structure and a means through which political control was practiced (Astill 2009, p. 260). This is also a discussion related to changing power structures between peasants and elites that has been addressed in chapter 3.

Of course, there is also the topic of hierarchical relationships between trading sites, which can underestimate the importance of small-scale exchange systems, thus making a “dendritic” network system a more favourable approach where these systems are more visible (Astill 2009, p. 264). Shifting back to a Scandinavian context, Sindbæk (2007) interprets an observable hierarchy between sites not as an implication of a “corresponding hierarchy of power”, but rather as reflections of pragmatism on the part of acting participants in long-distance trade to seek out the most “favourable, safe and active places of trade,” regardless of political situations (Sindbæk 2007, p. 128). Sindbæk (2007, p. 121) refers to such places as nodal points, which are distinct from the many local markets due to their “exclusive role” in long-distance trade. Such unique sites of an “incipient urban character” are identified archaeologically through a presence of similar assemblages, or recurrent finds of artifacts which are characteristic of long-distance trade relations or a variety of certain specialized craft production (Sindbæk 2007). Multiple shared interests could be seen in the marketplace, meaning, for instance those of itinerant workers as well as the elites who were their patrons (Astill 2009, p. 260).

In contrast to the “functionalist, ‘bundle of criteria’” approach, Croix suggests that urbanism can be defined in the more “abstract” terms of the *meaning* of these urban spaces and their impact on its inhabitants’ *lifestyles* (Pacione 2001, p. 21 in Croix 2020b, p. 116). Both Croix (2020b) and ten Herkel et al. (2013, p. x) focus on the concept of an urban identity as a critical component of developing urban spaces. This can be discussed archaeologically by applying a different social perspective upon material evidence of activities, consumption and lived environment which led its inhabitants to “experience something entirely different from outsiders” (Croix 2020b, p. 116). As has been stated before, a focus on urban identity, or generally more social questions regarding the lived experience of towns is a relatively “recent development” in the study of early medieval towns in Northern Europe (Croix 2020b, p. 115). Apart from the direct treatment on the subject in Viking Age towns in the British Isles (ten Herkel 2013), in the Scandinavian context specifically, the issue of urban identity is most often addressed in terms of “mercantile identity” of North Sea, Baltic or Ancient Rus identities (Croix 2020b, 115). To be considered alongside the concepts of identity discussed in the theory section,

Croix (ibid.) employs the psychological concept of place identity to define urban identity as a group or individual's "process of identification" with a community, which is inherently tied to a particular environment—or in simpler terms forming a sense of attachment to a particular place through consistent engagement with it and its community (ibid.).

Additionally, a town's unique setting would have, of course, been experienced differently by different individuals (Griffiths 2013, p. 10), for instance by strangers versus locals. Furthermore, urban spaces were comprised of heterogenous identities which were oftentimes potentially "conflicting and contrasting", and which would have impacted the lived experience of different groups and individuals, with further implications for the potential of "friction and open violence" constantly looming (Astill 2009, p. 67). Croix (2020b, p. 122) also brings up the difficulties of "managing social relations" in these contexts of increased economic competition and the lack of familial relations, amidst increased cultural diversity and potentially conflicting cultural and religious misunderstandings "through encounters with 'strangers', a greater density of population and unruly neighbours".

To add to this framework, it ought to be considered how an individual's intersectional identities would have affected one's interactions and limitations with the urban environment, and thus an integral part of considering the heterogenous lived experience within towns. Thus, ideas of spatial organization and exclusion which have been discussed in previous sections are relevant within the case study of Kaupang. The intentionality of expressing an identity, and more so the self-awareness of a particular identity is often challenging, even inaccessible, to archaeology despite how well archaeology is suited to discuss daily practices (Croix 2020b, p. 123). However, the expression of identity is most easily identified once it is contested, "and a tension [is] expressed", which is often quite difficult to isolate in the practices of everyday life (ibid., p. 123), especially when compared to the staged identities that are associated with burial practices.

Considering the amount of discernible urban organization and manifested ideology of spatial exclusion and access within the High and Late Middle Ages (section 2.1), compared to early Viking Age towns, coming up with locations where the subaltern could be 'found' provides significantly more challenges. Thus, one of the challenges in isolating criteria for spaces where the poor can be 'found' in cities, as spatiality, organization, seasonality, and the challenges regarding the possible presence of neighbourhoods or urban divisions comes up. In the example of Ribe in Denmark, Croix (2020b, p.119) states that although a novel way of living in Denmark,

the ‘urban planning’ of Ribe is similar to contemporary emporia of the North Sea regions. This includes a higher density of population and thus an increased proximity to one’s neighbours in comparison to rural settlements, while public spaces such as markets or a harbour have not yet been found in Ribe (*ibid.*). Although I have seen little to no discussions addressing neighbourhoods, ‘main’ streets or activity zones of production have been discussed in various sites (Croix 2020b; Skre 2007). Nonetheless, the identification of neighbourhoods is seemingly neglected not without reason. In the example of Kaupang, poor soil and preservation conditions have greatly impacted and limited certain interpretation potentials of the site (Pilø 2007). Deducing activities is a particularly challenging interpretation process requiring extensive excavations at a particular site (not to mention post-excavation analysis), and other factors such as how communal middens and different forms of waste management make discerning activity of an individual household challenging. Considering the resources required (not to mention the principles of sustainable excavations), it makes sense that no plot has been excavated in its full extent at Ribe (Croix 2020b, p. 119). However, at similar sites like Kaupang and Birka, plots are mainly occupied by houses—and it is common for urban dwellings to act both as living spaces and workshops (*ibid.*). Much like other emporia, Ribe has small lightly built houses in what would have been an “odd” sight for rural dwellers (*ibid.*, p. 121).

Although discussions surrounding early towns in Scandinavia are largely focused on the presence of elite materials and possessions, the subaltern are rarely discussed within this context. The discussion thus leads to the question of *who* would have inhabited urban zones. Given that the academic discourse is so centred on craft production and trade, perhaps the most readily available individuals that we could ‘populate’ the city with, are merchant and specialized craftworkers. Notably, “large-scale” textile production is often discussed as a characteristic of urban spaces that is often described as a “female industry”, where higher-class women oversaw the textile production by lower-class women (see section 3.4) (Øye 2011, p. 371; Sundman et al. 2013; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 2014) Furthermore, as has been discussed in sections 3.1 and 3.5, the presence of slaves, so often linked to rural work, must also be considered as inhabitants of urban settlements. For example, Raffield (2019, p. 690) discusses how slaves were held and sold in various locations rather than a distinct “slave market”, including a mention of remains of an animal pen in Viking Age Dublin with remains of a hearth and human fleas as a possible temporary dwelling for slaves.

As has been presented to be the case in rural environments, the relationship between animal byres or enclosures as places of cohabitation with thralls and other lower-class dependents must also be addressed in urban spaces (Eriksen 2019). Skre (2007) points out that the construction, solidity and presence of hearths and interior provisions of Kaupang's urban housing remain similar to rural settlements, with the exception that "houses in towns never had byres or stalls", although an animal pen has been documented at the site (A89947) (Skre 2007, p. 453). Poole (2013) expands on the presence of animals in urban spaces. Nonetheless, the narrative remains consistent in that animals had a decreased presence in emerging urban centres, especially cattle, as complex relationships

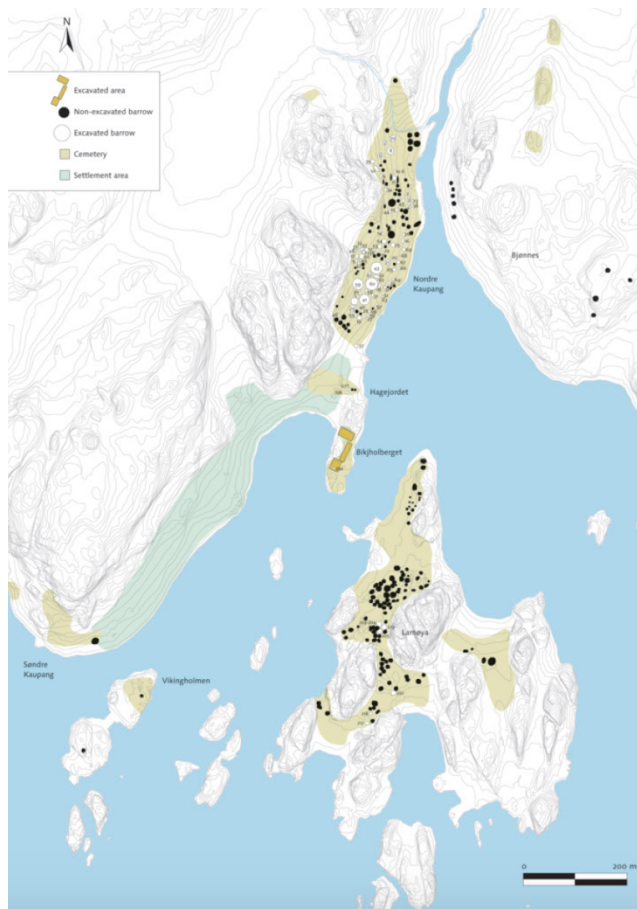


Figure 8. Cemeteries and excavation trenches from Kaupang (in Skre 2007, p. 69)

between rural areas as providers for urban centres developed (Poole 2013). However, cattle remains are more prominent in urban sites than others, which is a pattern seen in the British Isles, south Sweden, and Denmark and is related to patterns of consumption rather than husbandry (Poole 2013, p. 148). The presence of animal husbandry in urban spaces were generally constrained to less spatially demanding animals such as domesticated fowl, pigs (especially useful in urban spaces due to their diet and role in waste management) and sheep and goats as opposed to cattle (Poole 2013, Clarke and Ambrosiani 1991, p. 158 in Croix 2020b, p. 118)

#### 4.1 Case study of Kaupang

Located in Norway, Kaupang is known as one of the earliest urban sites in Scandinavia, founded around 800CE and is thought to have been abandoned sometime around the mid 10<sup>th</sup> century

(Skre 2007, p. 43). Kaupang itself is considered part of the central place complex of Skiringssal, which is first mentioned by the travelogue of the Norwegian Othere (Óttarr)—the earliest existing source on the site. Contemporary sources refer to Skiringssal as both an urban site but also an “important royal seat”, cult centre, and assembly place possibly including the whole of Viken (i.e. the lands surrounding the Oslofjord) (Skre 2007, p. 43). The site known as Skiringsal has received archeological attention for over 200 years, however it is marked by two significant archaeological investigations: the excavations led by Charlotte Blindheim between 1950-1974, and *The Kaupang Excavation Project* that was planned in the late 1990s and carried out between 2000-2003 (Skre et al. 2007; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2016; Skre 2011; Pedersen 2016). The urban site of Kaupang itself was discovered in 1956. Two of the four volumes that have been published on the documentation of the excavations and analyses conducted as a part of this research project were used in researching this case study (Skre 2011; Skre 2007).

According to Brink (2007, p. 64), the central settlement was likely Skiringsalr, thus making it possible that the surrounding settlements acted more as a complex where “the main residence at Skiringsal/Huseby was in control over the harbour and trading place at Kaupang, and perhaps also the assembly site at Tjølling” (Brink 2007, p. 64). The “first wave of urbanization” in Scandinavia, beginning around 800CE, is characterized by trade and craft production as the dominant forms of activity (Skre 2007, p. 45). As has been previously mentioned, these urban centres are mentioned in close connection to royal influence or the introduction of urban sites have been attributed to royal initiative, however interestingly, towns themselves did not function as seats or residences for kings or petty kings, and there has been no further evidence of any apparatuses of administrative function over the immediate surrounding area found at these sites, unlike in later periods of 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries onwards (Skre 2007, p. 45). About one kilometer north of the of the Kaupang settlement, the 1999-2003 excavations documented the remains of a hall built upon a raised platform and dated roughly to the mid 8<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> century and thus contemporary to the settlement at Kaupang.

Farms named Huseby are quite significant in Scandinavian historical research, as they are usually “large and centrally placed”, but also “several sources indicate that they played a role in the government of the early kingdoms” (Skre 2007, p. 223). Like other Husebys (or buildings of the same character), the fact that the platform was built at a natural high point of the environment, thus having had the “obvious purpose” of being as “conspicuous as possible within

the landscape,” which was achieved through a significant labour effort (Skre 2007, p. 230). Furthermore, the “vast cemeteries” alongside the road from Kaupang to Huseby (Skre 2007, p. 452), contextualize the powerscapes and sacred environment surrounding the buildings of Kaupang and the experience of its inhabitants. Further recalling the theoretical framework presented in section 1.3, this also exemplifies how political practices were embedded in everyday life as architectural and spatial production of landscapes reflected politically motivated practices that produced, reinforced, and defined social differences (Johansen and Bauer 2011, p. 4).

The hall itself probably had a central chamber, with entrances likely at both the north and southern ends of the building, as well as the possibility of a smaller chamber at each end of the building, however reconstructions of the hall remain highly uncertain due to the poor preservation of the archaeological record, and comparisons to similar structures are used by Skre (2007, pp. 223- 247) in the hall’s analysis. Although no hearths have been documented within the hall (Skre 2007, p. 240), some degree of spatially differentiation can be discerned from the distribution of finds which indicate possible activity zones. The majority of the finds from this building are associated to textile production activities and were generally confined to the northern entrance chamber (likely due to the need of light for textile work)(Skre 2007, p. 238), however evidence of gold smithing, glass bead production, and other craftworking activities was found in the northern part of the building, with the exception of amberworking artefacts generally found in the southern end of the building (Skre 2007, p. 241). The surprising presence of craft production in such a hall has been interpreted by others (at the halls and surroundings of Slöinge and Järrestad)(Söderberg 2005, pp. 221-6 *in* Skre 2007, p. 241) to have a “ritual character” as the transformation of raw materials into valuable artefacts took place under an elite presence which highlight their role as bringers of wealth. Although the preservation of the Huseby hall does not allow for any identification or further spatial syntax analysis of “rooms beyond the byre” or any other spatial access vs exclusion practices that could lead to a discussion of the halls inhabitants as presented by Eriksen (2019), it also does not exclude the possibility of such practices or the presence of any dependents that have been discussed in such settings in section 3.1. If anything, the evidence of craftworking in an elite space can also be interpreted as conspicuous practices of control or displays of power, perhaps in a similar manner as the relationship between unfree producers by Linaa (2015) in section 3.5.

The frequency of burials at the cemetery that is linked to the king of Skiringssal and his people has been used to determine the extent of the Skiringssal estate. It has been proposed that the population of around 10-15 farmsteads buried their dead in this cemetery (Nordre Kaupang)(Skre 2007, pp. 382-3). Nordre Kaupang is thought to have been where Skiringssal petty kings, their households and the people who occupied their farms around them and were thus “bound” by the royal seat, not to mention probably “the king’s fighting men” had the “privilege” of burying their dead (Skre 2007, p. 383), while other farms may have been “worked by other classes, such as thralls or people of varying degrees of freedom” (Skre 2007, p. 443) Seeing as this cemetery was located on the road that would have led to Huseby hall, the “memorial function” of burial mounds must be stressed, as individuals “passing through the memorials raised to his ancestors and his people” were thus faced with recognizing his lordly authority as they moved from the hall to the harbour and town of Kaupang. It is also worth stressing the potential importance of discussing the inhabitants of the other surrounding farms mentioned by Skre (*ibid.*), especially if they are considered within the contexts of the different models of itinerancy presented by Ashby (2015) and discussed in section 3.5 (*Fig. 6*). It is thus possible to imagine a relationship between the urban and rural spaces of Skiringssal, as it could have been possible that the individuals working at these farms might have also taken part in the crafting activities at Kaupang and engaged in a frequent or seasonal mobility pattern—however further studies would be needed to investigate such a hypothesis.

The cemeteries surrounding Kaupang provide us with crucial information about the site. There is a significant difference between burial practices of these two most extensive cemeteries, as the cemetery of Nordre Kaupang is associated with the elite, as it is mainly comprised of cremations and barrow burials, while Bikjholberget solely contained inhumations and mainly flat graves (Stylegar 2007, pp. 99, 73). The cemeteries exhibit a great variety of burial customs; however little can definitively be said about any distinctions between who would have been buried at the different cemeteries, seeing as aristocratic burial rites occur alongside contexts where more “ordinary burials” were found (*ibid.*). This pattern has a parallel in Birka, where more richly furnished inhumations have been interpreted as burials of highly mobile merchants or locals converted to Christianity (Ambrosiani 1992, p. 20 *in* Stylegar 2007, p. 101).

The presence of thralls has also been suggested at this settlement based on the burial records (*ibid.*, p. 90). Three inhumations were found (Ka. 274-276) to have been buried without

any coffins or any furnishings. The skeletons were found in twisted positions, indicating that the bodies might have been placed directly in pits, with their feet tied together. As previously mentioned in section 3.1, links have been made to deviant burials in Anglo-Saxon archaeology, however they have also been interpreted as thrall graves, and their presence at Kaupang has been attributed to the local community importing thralls to make up for the absence of a number of males due to Viking activities (*ibid.*, p. 91). However, it cannot be specified whether this workforce would have been used in Kaupang, or within the surrounding local farms of Skiringssal. Alternatively, seeing as these burials can be interpreted as deviant burials (i.e. criminals etc.), their burial within the cemetery could be reflective of the judicial functions that took place in Skiringssal as well (*ibid.*).

As will be discussed further, the presence of Franks or Frisians is also suggested by the burial evidence at Kaupang. No distinctly Christian burial ground has been documented at Kaupang, and it has also been suggested that it is nearly impossible to identify graves belonging to converted individuals (*ibid.*, p. 99). However, pragmatic Christian burials will be discussed further. Although the burial record provides no evidence of Slavonic personal possessions, the presence of Slavs (from the area surrounding Rügen) is attested from the pottery found throughout Kaupang (Skre 2011, p. 435; Pilø 2011). Roslund (2007, pp. 232-3; 249) points out that in the earliest part of the Viking Age Slavs were both brought in as slaves and “guests in the house” comings as traders and craftsmen to sites or households that offered them protection and opportunities. The depositional patterns suggest a seasonal presence at Kaupang which could be a reflection of either such practices, although more permanent residence in later periods is not excluded (Pilø 2011).

Much like Birka (as discussed in section 3.4), Kaupang has a “striking difference” in the gender pattern of burial (58% in Kaupang cemeteries vs 25% female burials in the region as a whole)(Stylegar 2007, pp. 65, 82; Øye 2011, p. 371). Like Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. (2014), Øye (2011, pp. 370-1) considered the large assemblages of textile production from the settlement and textile production artefacts interred as grave goods to suggest that this can be explained by women’s role in textile production and thus the increased presence of females in towns. Both the archaeological record and contemporary written sources from the Continent indicate that textile production was a “female industry” (*ibid.*) Furthermore, women of higher status are thought to



have administered production, while lower status or unfree women are thought to have done the production itself (ibid.; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al., 2014; Sundman et al. 2013).

#### 4.1.1 Kaupang and its Buildings

The earliest settlement phases (dated to around 800CE) at Kaupang have been interpreted as temporary, or seasonal due to the typology of buildings that would have made winter settlement unlikely, the limited amount of waste, as well as the stratigraphical interruptions of natural sand sediments between occupation horizons (Pilø 2007 p. 193). This site period (SP I), lasts roughly 10 years, from 800CE, yet varies between plots (Pilø 2007; Skre 2011, p.25). The second Site Period (SP II) includes the earlier part of the site's permanent settlements from 805/810CE-840/850CE and includes a variety of deposition events (Pilø 2007). While the third site period (SP III) includes all later events (potentially up to 863 CE), yet, is not defined by functional changes as SP I and SP II are, but rather by post-deposition events, and due to the damage by ploughing events few deposits remained identifiable, apart from those around the harbour. After these periods, it is proposed that the occupation and activity increased at the settlement until around 930 CE, however information on building types remains confined to the mid 9<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the majority of the evidence that will be discussed in this section is largely attributed to SP II, in order to discuss the "permanent population" of Kaupang during this period.



Figure 9. Documentation of various buildings within the excavation trench (in Pilø 2007, p. 202)

In order to consider who would have inhabited the settlement of Kaupang, the publications on this excavation provide both descriptive details and interpretations of several buildings. The remains of seven buildings in total were excavated during the 1999-2003 excavations (*Fig. 10*), and a further two buildings were documented in the 1956-1974 excavations. Unfortunately, various unfavourable preservation conditions have significantly affected the interpretation of these buildings (Pilø 2007, p. 203). Nonetheless, the buildings that have been documented are typically defined by presence of central hearth and dark occupation deposits, and occasionally “two parallel lines” of occupation deposits were identified on either side of a hearth (*Fig. 10*). These have been interpreted as a separated space from the central hearth, likely separated by planks on edge in order to separate the earthen floors of the central area from the side areas which had been interpreted as sleeping and/or sitting areas (*ibid.*, p. 204). Pilø (*ibid.*) also mentions that the houses were all oriented in the same way—with their “short ends” facing the shore. Unfortunately, the outer walls of buildings were difficult to distinguish, thus any building that might have been built without a hearth or internal divisions were very difficult to identify as the project relied only on thin section analysis to indicate occupation deposits.

Nonetheless **Building A304 (SP II)** was identified using this methodology and only based on occupational deposits, as no hearth or outer walls were identified. Interestingly, the assemblage from this building contains the “usual” settlement waste, with no clear difference when compared artefactual assemblages from other buildings, apart from a slightly increased presence of glass bead production waste (*ibid.*, p. 207). The function of this building has been interpreted to be primarily domestic, however as with the other buildings, craft activities are present within the daily lives of the individuals who would have inhabited this space. The reliance on morphological analysis to determine the function of this building makes it difficult to propose alternative interpretations, however in bringing up this building, it seems that different kinds of living arrangements were present within Kaupang.

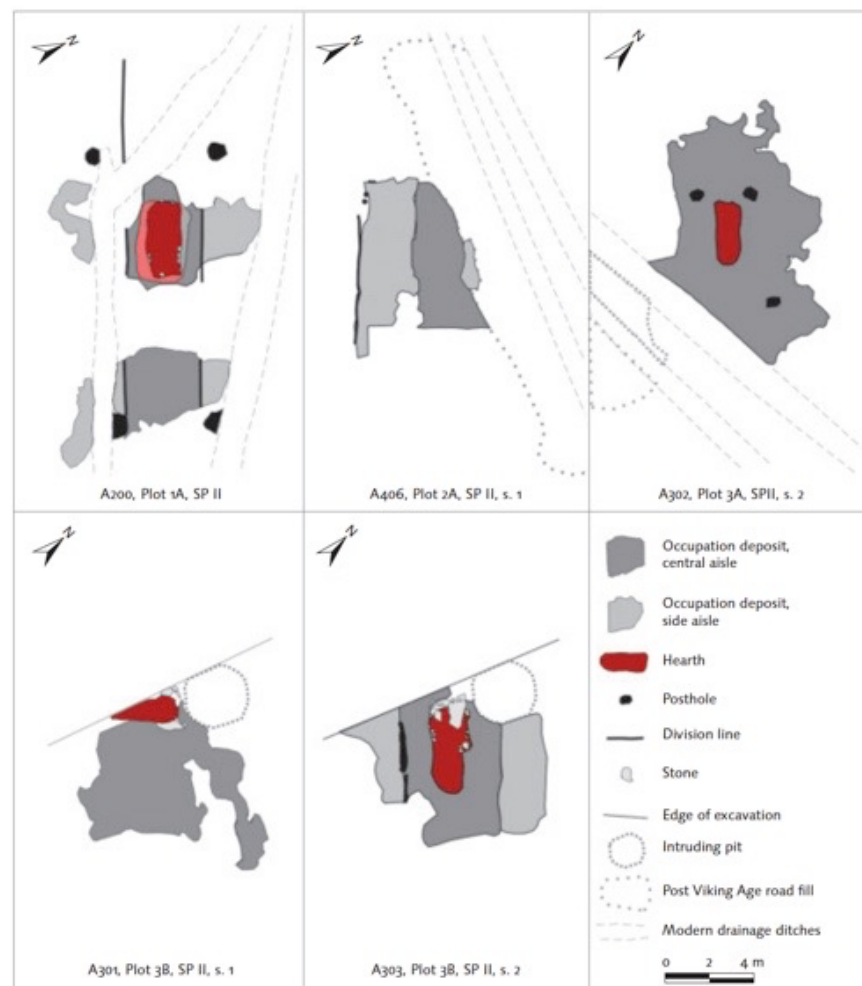


Figure 10. Detailed drawings of individual buildings described below. Published image from (Pilø 2007, p. 203)

**Building A200 (SP II)** was the largest building found in Kaupang and provided sufficient remains of the interior organization of the house (i.e. preserved aisles). This building is characterized by predominantly domestic activity, as well as sparse amber crafting, and relatively few finds of weaving activity (Skre 2011, p. 409-410). However, Croix (2020a, p.19) argues that the small number of broken loom weights found within this household and the consequent interpretation of only small-scale textile production taking place, does not account for the fact that broken loom weights would have been discarded as “cumbersome waste” within a domestic space, which is supported by the larger number of loom weights that were found in nearby outdoor trash events. Like the other buildings, the interpretation of Building A200 (*Fig 9*, top left) remains limited by the preservation of the archaeological record at Kaupang, namely various ploughing events, leaving only the central part of the building well preserved, while the remaining occupation deposits have been ploughed away. Although no outer walls were identified during excavation, the building fits into the standard description of excavated buildings previously described with a hearth, occupation deposits, parallel markings for planks and four post holes. The artifacts found in the occupation deposits were the most important in determining the function of the building, however, the larger items were likely removed, as both Croix (2020a, p. 19) and Pilø (2007, p. 205) suggest, leaving only smaller objects or redeposited objects. Both textile and amber working activities have been attributed to this building, however the scale of this production is hard to distinguish. Interestingly, there was significantly more ceramic finds in the side aisles. Two entrances are hypothesised by Pilø (*ibid.*, p. 206), one of which is associated to disposal deposits of hearth and floor materials.

**Building A406** was the only building that had any indication of preserved outer walls, however, like A304, this building is thought to have been built without a hearth as only some remains of an earthen floor have remained, leading to some uncertainty about whether this was a building at all. **Building A302** is associated with smithing activities based on the amount of slag and other smithing by-products, as well as domestic occupation, and a possible storage space.

It should be noted that the non-ferrous metalworkers at Kaupang used a wide range of alloys, including brass, bronze, alloys of gold and silver, silver and tin (Pedersen 2015, p.55). Pedersen (*ibid.*) suggests that individual craftworkers mastered all of these various metals, and potentially more crafts, metal casting is more conspicuous in the archaeological record due to the amount of waste it leaves behind (not to mention a preservation bias in Kaupang’s difficult

conditions). The significant amount of skilled labour needed to work with such metals is a result of a long-period of training (i.e. apprenticeship), and while difficult to trace archaeologically, Pedersen claims that non-ferrous metalworking is well-suited for apprenticeship, as “knowledge and skills could be built over time” (ibid., p. 57). The variation in metalworking tools is indicative of what can only be attributed to different groups of metalworkers, some of which might have operated at the same time (ibid.). Although wide range of materials used, this is exemplified as building A302 favoured copper alloys, while Building A200 favoured silver.

*Building A301 (SP II)* has been interpreted as a Frisian merchant’s house. Within this building a hearth, domestic deposits from a central earthen floor and side aisles have been documented. The evidence of organic bedding material in the side aisles as well as the concentration of domestic activities around the hearth creates a limited picture of the spatial organization of this house (Pilø 2007, p. 210). The artefact assemblage indicates textile production and domestic activities within this building (ibid.). The concentrated presence of Frankish metalwork, pottery, and glassware has been interpreted to indicate that at least one of the house’s residents was of Frankish or Frisian origin that were “permanently settled” in Kaupang (Skre 2011, p. 431), while the presence of hacksilver has led to the interpretation of mercantile activity between the Frisian members of this household with “their homelands”, or Frisians in other Scandinavian or English towns (ibid., p. 432). Interestingly, the discussion of this house is centred on its female inhabitant(s). Three “everyday” female dress accessories were found, notably a double-ended dress hook (C52519/28305) that had “no use” on contemporary Scandinavian female dress”, nor thought of as a traded good, neither was it particularly valuable—thus making it unlikely plunder (ibid., p. 431). The significant remains of Frisian glassware suggests that the inhabitants “must have followed Frankish/Frisian drinking habits” (ibid., p.432), while the remains of Frisian pottery unique to this building also supports the maintenance of cultural identity by the inhabitants, while the structure of the house is the same as some neighbouring houses. Remnants of textile production, a standard find of domestic activities, was also identified (Pilø 2007, p. 210). Other iron items found in the building have been interpreted as a stockpile related to trade activities, while the Skre (2011, p. 433) further infers that these merchants would have also possessed trade goods that cannot be identified archaeologically, such as “furs and slaves.” This brings up further questions about where such

slaves would have been housed or whether they would have participated in domestic activities, such as weaving, before they were sold further on.

The permanent settlement of Frisians is also potentially backed up by the burial record. Although no distinct Christian cemetery has been identified at Kaupang, Frisians were, at the time, Christian (*ibid.*, p. 434). In the absence of consecrated ground, “pragmatic Christian burials” can be assumed (i.e. graves with Christian features such as E-W orientation, inhumation, few grave goods etc.) (*ibid.*). Four burials which exhibit Frisian Christian burial practices were documented at the Bikjholberget cemetery—three of which were rectangular coffins laid together (Ka. 318-320, Ka. 314)(*ibid.*; Stylegar 2007, pp. 89-90). Although Christianity can thus perhaps be placed in Kaupang via Frisian merchants, it seems too big a leap to presume any Christian ideology, specifically regarding the poor, would have significantly permeated the communities in Kaupang.

Finally, *feature A89947* was interpreted as a possible animal pen, specifically a pigsty, due to the rectangular construction, densely set stakeholes and narrow ditches, and clear difference in the soil on the inside and outside of the construction. It also contained deposits of artefacts and bones characteristic of waste disposal. This feature is worth briefly considering alongside the points brought up by Raffield (2019) on possibilities of other animal pens in urban sites to be associated as temporary slave dwellings (see section 3.5).

Both Poole (2013) and Eriksen (2019) note that human-animal relations were less separated than we know them in our societies, due to the proximity in which they lived, even in urban spaces, yet more so in rural living. Furthermore, Croix (2020b, p.120) brings up feasting and drinking activities, which can be conceptualised within their use in building and maintaining social relations (section 3.2). However, Poole (2008, p. 110), suggests that isolating waste events from particular households, such as feasts, is much more difficult to do zooarchaeologically in an urban setting due to communal waste disposal. This poses another potential problem for the interpretation of poverty in urban spaces. Considering the analysis of the Galgedil cemetery by (Price et al. 2014) in Section 3.1, there is a connection between status, gender and diet which could be useful to consider within an urban setting. Although communal waste disposal was practiced, and individual household food consumption is hard to characterise through zooarchaeological remains in middens, differences in values of presence of terrestrial vs. marine

osteological remains could potentially be compared between different middens in a site as a part of the general question of whether neighbourhoods can be identified.

The conditions of the site, meaning soil quality and plough damage resulted in a very poor preservation of osteological material (specifically of animal bones) within Kaupang, resulting in high amounts of fragmentation and poor surfaces which made the identification of specimens quite difficult according to the osteological report included in this publication (Barret et al. 2007). Thus, this significantly limits any analysis into patterns of diet based on household consumption and thus the possibility of using such distribution patterns to help consider whether any kinds of neighbourhoods were present. Furthermore, although there is a midden feature documented at the site (*Fig. 9*), there are also waste disposal events documented at feature A89947 (the animal pen), as well as in the vicinity of certain buildings. Unfortunately, a discussion on waste disposal has not been identified within the volumes. A latrine was also briefly mentioned in this volume (Skre 2007, p. 160), however no further discussion on it was identified. Future studies that directly study the reports or excavated material from these projects seem promising, especially considering Linaa's (2015) study that uses waste disposal patterns as a means of identifying powerlessness within a settlement.

#### 4.1.2 Further Interpretations of the Presented Material

Despite the unfavourable preservation of the archaeological record, the material at Kaupang nonetheless presents a distinct pattern of urban dwellings. Although the buildings of Kaupang predate those in Dublin by at least a century, a comparison of building styles has been made (Pilø 2007, p. 216). However, the similarities between rural longhouses and the houses seen in Kaupang is perhaps more useful, especially considering the proximity of Kaupang's rural surroundings. Namely, the internal divisions of these houses "had their origins" in rural longhouses, however their smaller size and the smaller interior posts would have made the houses in Kaupang appear very different—as they were less solidly-constructed than rural buildings (*ibid.*, p. 217). This recalls Croix's (2020b) points on how urban identity was formed around a distinct, tangible way of life from the rural, a similar phenomenon can be identified at Kaupang. Once again, the preservation of the site makes it hard to tell whether the differences between buildings (such as A304) was intentional or simply a result of post-depositional processes, comparisons to other early urban towns would yield more info about differences of

budlings and the lived experience within them. The presence of slaves and servants within households ought to be addressed, especially within the contexts of the female-associated ‘industry’ of textile making that has been described at various buildings in Kaupang. Although unclear whether this was extended to urban contexts, it is worth bringing up that according to the Icelandic sagas, even the poorest households had at least one female servant. (Miller 1990, p. 122).

It is also interesting to consider the temporary residences and seasonality of residence associated to both Kaupang and other similar emporia, alongside the harsh or apprehensive views towards outsiders, outlaws, or people moving and looking for work outside of designated ‘moving days’ discussed in section 3.2 in both Icelandic laws as well as Swedish laws and Eriksen’s (2019) analysis on the crossing of boundaries. Through this parallel, one can consider the opportunities a proto-town could have provided for the ‘worthy-poor’ looking for work. Although itinerant craftspeople and traders clearly relied on social networks that allowed their movement between residences and towns, the opportunities for itinerant and/or impoverished freed individuals should be considered alongside the relative ‘anonymity’ towns would have provided (Geremek 1994). Some of the opportunities of urban spaces that Geremek (*ibid.*) describes include occasional work for unskilled labours in the harbour, maintenance and building projects in cities for example. However, considering the powerscapes of Kaupang that have been previously established, as well as the relatively smaller size in comparison to other towns on the continent from which Geremek (1994) based his analysis on, Kaupang perhaps did not provide enough anonymity for this.

Pedersen (2015) argues that Kaupang housed both short and long-term non-ferrous metalworkers, thus the metalworkers at Kaupang were a heterogenous group of people whose workspaces were not confined to a particular area (i.e. neighbourhood)—which is partially exemplified by the material preferences between A302 and A200. Furthermore, these workshops could have also included non-specialized workers, or taking of apprentices. Although this ties into Geremek’s (1994) point regarding the possibilities of labour in towns, it, more importantly, also allows one to consider whether fostered children or adults taken into the care of family members by functions like the *hreppr* could have been such apprentices (here the proximity of the *thing* site of Skiringssal *Þjóðalyng* can be considered) (*see* Skre 2007, pp. 385-406). Furthermore, as described in section 3.5, a metal workshop would have needed both skilled and



unskilled labour, which Pedersen (2015, p. 57) attributed to “guests in a house”, however thralls could have also possibly conducted these tasks. The surrounding farmsteads of Skiringssal can further be considered within the context of Ashby’s (2015b) models of frequent or seasonal mobility that have been discussed in section 3.5. Thus, it is not unlikely that surrounding community artisans with their rural homebases would have been present on a permanent or semi-permanent basis at Kaupang as either the “guests in the house” or the local masters that Pedersen (2015) describes. Such artisans might have also experienced varying degrees of freedoms or dependencies, especially considering the power dynamics of crafts production previously discussed within Huseby hall. The issue of supplying raw materials to urban craftworkers can yield insight into the status and lived experience of craftworkers. Although various social networks are recognized as a means of procuring such material by craftworkers, hierarchical power dynamics must naturally be considered within this equation, as such supplies could have been provided by slave owners, fostering families, and/or local lords and thus indicate the presence of the subaltern within the archaeological record.

## 5. Discussion

Before reconsidering the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis it is worth considering a few conclusions and challenges that can be drawn from the material that has been presented. Although the archaeological and historical sources both provide comparatively minimal evidence of the subaltern—their presence in society is nonetheless a reality that has never been doubted. Nor was this thesis' aim to argue that poverty, the subaltern or social outcasts *existed*. There is, however, perhaps something to be said about the possibility that poverty increased as the Medieval period went on. Geremek (1994) argues for an increase in exploitation and a process of pauperization and proletarianization of rural inhabitants and unskilled workers as they were gradually reduced to individuals with labour as their sole form of capital—as a sort of tangential precursor to the capitalism that began emerging in the early modern period. Arcini (2018, p. 56) also points out that stature is regarded as a health parameter, and although other factors weigh in, it is nevertheless thought of as a measure of living conditions. Arcini (*ibid.*) thus argues that Viking Age populations were not particularly unhealthy in general. This is not to say that the pre-urban, pre-capitalist 'tribal kingdoms' of Europe were a utopia without poverty, simply that political, economic, and cultural changes developed into a system of exploitation, at least in the poverty that can be recognized today—if I may risk generalizations. However, this merely provides a hypothesis that could benefit from further research yet will likely never fully be answered.

One of the major conclusions that can be drawn from this thesis is the importance of social networks or communities within Viking Age society. This is not necessarily a new point, however, when considered within the context of poverty and the subaltern, this factor can be recontextualized as a 'social security net' of sorts. Section 2.2.2 establishes how systems of fostering or community-organized relocation of people helped ameliorate the situations of individuals that were experiencing poverty. Furthermore, section 2.2.1 further expands on this idea in pointing out that the church or the introduction of Christianity did not introduce empathy and care for the poor, but rather adjusted this traditionally secular, community-organized care by giving it religious meaning and extending it to individuals outside kinship groups. In section 2.1.1 we see similar patterns of community solidarity providing aid to impoverished families in the medieval period on the Continent, albeit without such 'institutions' as the *hreppr*, while

section 2.1.2 can provide another parallel of solidarity between the broader Christian community through the institutionalization of charity for the visible, deserving poor within cities.

Households, particularly those in rural contexts can thus safely be assumed as a locus where the 'care for the poor' can be identified, especially before the later stages of Christianization in Scandinavia where such a locus was shifted to almshouses or hospitals for instance. The importance of such networks become particularly salient as the comparatively harsh treatment of vagrants or outlaws are considered. Furthermore, the evidence provided in chapters 2 and 3 decidedly demonstrate the promising potential of discussing poverty and the subaltern in rural spaces.

Section 3.5 brings up the importance of social networks and power relations that enabled craft workers to move between markets, and can consider how networks further affected the livelihoods of such individuals. As illness and disability was discussed in Section 3.3, a few examples of individuals with dwarfism and leprosy that received indistinguishable burial treatment from non-disabled individuals of similar status were presented. I would argue that this exemplifies how social networks or status would have taken precedent over physical disabilities in determining the 'care' one would receive that could ensure an individual's survival, maintenance of social status, but potentially also but offer protection from impoverishment. I would also suggest that further studies could reconsider healed physical trauma in osteological material with similar burial contexts within a similar interpretation. The evidence summarized above thus sufficiently exemplifies the primacy of social hierarchies and networks in Viking Age societies.

Chapter 4 begins by pointing out that urban spaces have not been sufficiently 'peopled' within the academic discourse or are predominantly concerned with the merchants and elite responsible for the general function and establishment of these sites in order to answer 'big questions' about the town's function. However, this thesis has attempted such a task. The material presented on Kaupang, as well as other contemporary towns in Scandinavia, and the research presented throughout chapter 3, attests to the presence of low-status workers, thralls, an increased presence of women, alongside migrants and well-off merchants that have been more readily associated to these spaces. The arguments brought up in chapter 4 regarding a town's different, potentially conflicting, identities and economic interests might have resulted in frictions or difficulties of managing social relations are thus relevant to the case study of

Kaupang. Overall, the material does not allow for any interpretations of neighbourhoods, let alone poorer neighbourhoods or spatial manifestations of the aforementioned conflicts, as is expected of contemporary towns on the Continent and later medieval towns. The proposed reality of slave labour as well as various hierarchical dependencies of lower-status workers seems to have resulted in heterogenous living arrangements where these hierarchies were manifested within individual households, rather than in the city as a whole.

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, investigating poverty and the subaltern in Viking Age societies is not without its challenges. This thesis is fundamentally exploratory in nature, as it tries to investigate and isolate which ideologies, social factors, and archaeological material are relevant for discussing poverty. Seeing as there is no previous study on this specific topic, the scope of this thesis was consequently quite broad as I have attempted to lay the groundwork and accumulate the relevant information and theoretical toolkit for future archaeological research. This thesis covers various topics, theoretical perspectives, and methodologies both in how other scholars have studied the archaeological record but also in presenting discourse from written Norse sources and historical research of the medieval period on the continent. Such a broad scope consequently means that this thesis cannot provide the same kind of conclusions, as you would have from directly studying the materials of a particular site, artefact assemblage or osteological remains.

In regards to the material itself, the poor preservation at Kaupang has limited the analysis of this site. The acidic soil of the site resulted in a fragmented osteological assemblage within the settlement itself thus limiting any spatial analysis in relation to waste management practices or patterns of food consumption. Furthermore, the substantial disruptions of the stratigraphy by ploughing activities, while in some cases buildings could not be fully excavated as they extended beyond the project's excavation trench, led to difficulties in interpreting the structural remains of the building (Pilø 2007, p. 203). The preservation at the site of Kaupang thus considerably limit the interpretations that can be made of spatial organization and lived experience within the buildings. However, comparisons to similar sites, such as Birka or Hedeby, were often made by the various authors that contributed to the research of the site and could be useful if future studies were to pick up this topic again. Nonetheless, there is a rich amount of analysis produced about Kaupang which has been presented in the volumes used in this thesis (Skre 2007;2011).

Hansson et al.'s (2020, p. 7) study of poverty in 19<sup>th</sup> century Sweden considers evidence of reuse and repair, especially of low value items within appropriate contexts. Although a particularly useful method that was unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis, this kind of evidence seems especially promising for future studies of poverty. Creating an assemblage of inexpensive or lower-status artefacts from the Viking Age within which reuse and repair can be assessed, could prove helpful in order to help identify poverty—although generally speaking the preservation bias towards such artefacts potentially makes this easier said than done. Affordable crafts ought to be included in such an assemblage. Knarrström (2001, p. 150) has suggested that the continued use of flint into the Viking Age in Scania could be interpreted as “the only material remains of the otherwise invisible slaves,” while Mould (2015) considers household production of simply made “affordable” shoes. Such examples are suggestions for creating a group of archaeological material in order to help identify artefact assemblages within specific depositional events and contexts (Joyce et al. 2010). Sindbaek (2007) proposes that urban centers can be identified archaeologically through a presence of assemblages, or recurrent finds of artifacts which are characteristic of long-distance trade relations or a variety of certain specialized craft production. Applying a similar methodology can create assemblages that can be used to identify poverty and the subaltern, which would ideally include affordable crafts, reused or repaired inexpensive artefacts, particular spatial patterns that indicate powerlessness or spatial exclusion, as well as relevant osteological material for example.

A final concern that ought to be addressed is theoretical in nature—that is whether, by considering the various identities that made up the subaltern within the Viking Age as ‘the poor’, creates an artificial group which would not have been contemporaneously considered as such. In the later medieval period, Christian ideology provides a direct ‘definition’ of who counted as the poor (i.e. worthy and unworthy poor, as well as the poor with Lazarus or the poor with Peter). However, the ideology of the Viking Age does not provide evidence of such a cohesive definition. This thesis fundamentally avoids ‘finding’ a group of people and labeling them as the poor through the employed theoretical perspectives of intersectionality and subaltern studies that stress heterogeneity and individuality of experiences. Instead, it stresses that varying levels of poverty were experienced differently by a heterogenous assemblage of individuals, thus recognizing that ‘the poor’ were not made up of a cohesive group. Furthermore, as discussed in section 2.1, the medieval period saw individuals who were systematically impoverished,

although they were not necessarily included within this ideological definition of the poor. Both historical studies and our own modern notions of poverty recognize that ‘the poor’ are not made up of a cohesive group, but rather one of many identities an individual may have possessed which severely impacted their lives.

In order to conclude this discussion, the following paragraph will discuss to what degree the research aims and questions were can be answered. The first aim was constructing a relevant theoretical toolkit for defining poverty. As previously discussed, applying an intersectional and subaltern perspective to the material was particularly useful. The success of this toolkit is evident considering the variety of individuals whose heterogenous identities and interaction with hierarchies of power can be discussed as the subaltern, and thus increased vulnerabilities to poverty. The second aim of investigating poverty in Medieval and Viking Age ideology was also successful in compiling a substantial discourse on how poverty was framed by medieval and Viking Age ideologies, as well as in understanding how various hierarchies and social support systems interacted to ‘create’ individuals more vulnerable to poverty. These ideologies were also explored in chapter 3 as archaeological material was discussed. The third and final aim of this thesis was to consider how such ideologies are expressed archaeologically and was answered throughout chapters 3 and 4. Chapter 3 specifically tackles how various subaltern identities have been investigated through archaeological remains, providing a lot of material for future studies throughout the text, while section 4 particularly considers how such factors can be discussed within an urban setting, specifically Kaupang. Although studies cited in this text shows the promise of future studies using spatial analysis (amongst other methods), the methodology of this thesis and the available literature did not allow for any reinterpretations of material that would determine neighbourhood or zones of poverty. Although this phenomenon can be identified archaeologically, it remains a challenging prospect as it requires a comprehensive methodology and archaeological material record.

Although Kaupang may not be the perfect case study to investigate poverty, bearing in mind that other sites could provide an archaeological record that is better preserved or provide evidence of early Christian communities where the ideologies presented in section 2.1 may be more relevant, much of the evidence discussed throughout the text were nonetheless applicable to the extant material. It is decidedly a testament to the possibilities presented in this thesis that so much can be said about the subaltern at this site. The perspectives and contextualization

provided by this thesis aimed to be applicable to multiple urban sites that present limitations or challenges—not just a perfect case study.

## 6. Conclusion

This thesis aimed to contribute to recent academic trends of adding nuance to the lived experience of individuals in urban spaces, thus continuing the move beyond functional descriptions of cities and the previous ‘faceless blobs’ that inhabited them. This task was undertaken by applying relevant ideologies or material from historical sources and the archaeological material to a case study that successfully ‘peopled’ the subaltern into urban spaces and provided a preliminary mapping of powerscapes in Kaupang and the surrounding area of Skiringssal. This thesis has discussed and stressed the fact that the poor and subaltern were made up of heterogenous identities, and thus cannot be simply identified as one would discuss gender, elite status, or ethnicity. No single identity determines whether an individual was poor. Thus, identifying diseases or famine, thrall smiths, or deviant burials cannot indicate poverty in and of itself. Instead, relevant evidence should be considered in aggregate, and hopefully future research can help build on this promising area of archaeology. Poverty is a topic that covers various aspects of an individual’s life, thus a single study or methodology cannot extensively answer the question of what it *meant* to be poor.



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